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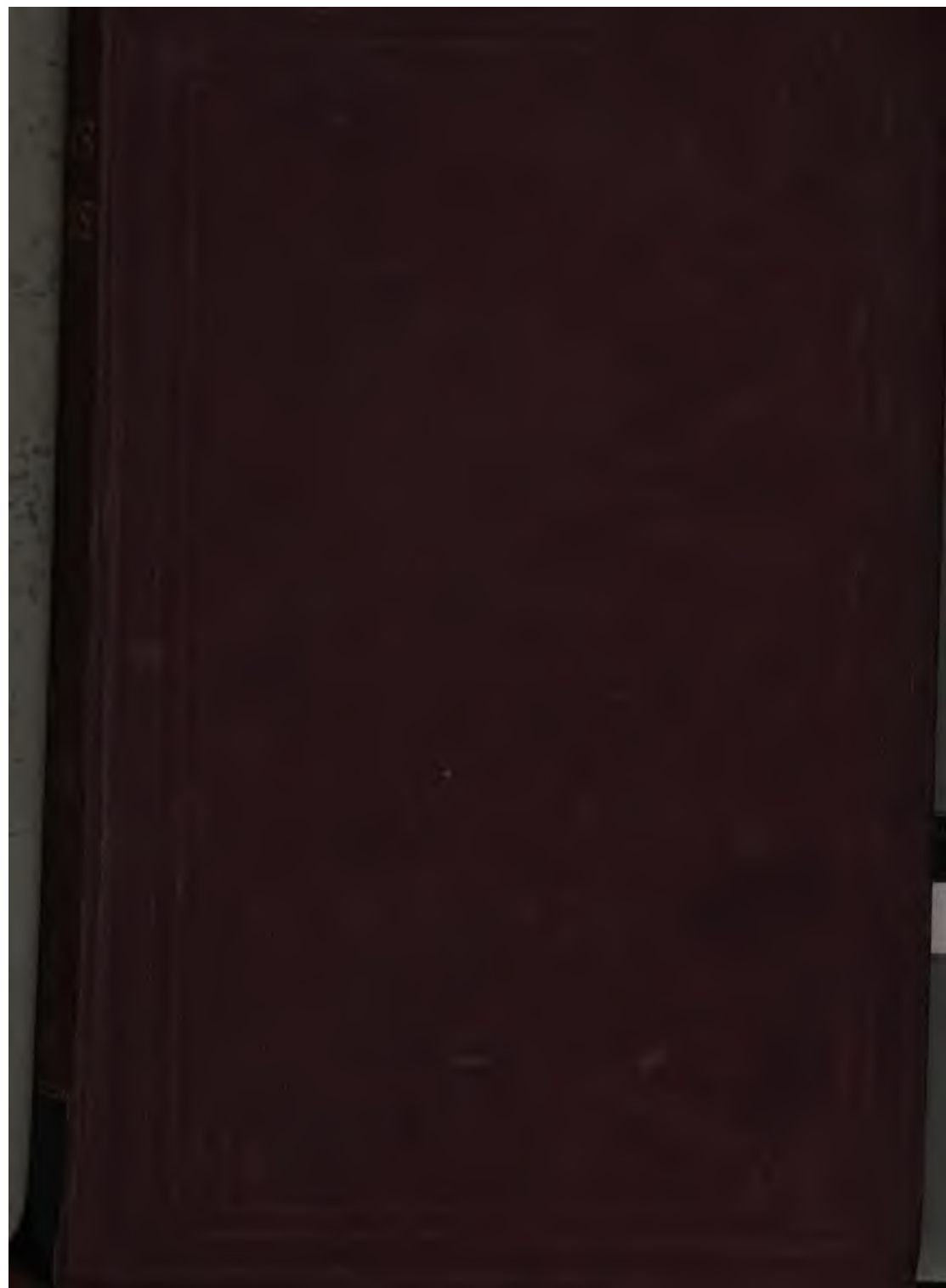
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LORD OAKBURN'S DAUGHTERS.

BY

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ASHLYDYAT," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LORD OAKBURN'S DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE WEDDING AT ST. MARK'S.

IN the very heart of South Wennock, standing a little back from the street, nearly opposite the Red Lion Inn, was the old church of St. Mark; and on the morning after the return home of Mr. Carlton and his bride, this church was invaded by more people than could conveniently get into it, for a rumour had gone forth to the town that Mr. Carlton and Lady Laura were to be re-married.

It was even so. Possibly in deference to Laura's scruples; possibly that he himself was not willing to trust to the impromptu ceremony in Scotland, which had been of the slightest, and that he would constitute her his own beyond the power of any future quibbles of law to dispute, Mr. Carlton had returned home provided with a licence in all due form. The clergyman was apprised, and nine o'clock saw Mr. Carlton and Laura at the church.

If, by fixing that early hour, their motive was to avoid gaping spectators, the precaution had utterly failed. How the news got about was a puzzle to Mr. Carlton as long as he lived. He accused the incumbent of St. Mark's, the Reverend Mr. Jones, of spreading it; he accused the curate, Mr. Lycett, to whom was deputed the duty of marrying them; he accused the clerk, who was charged to have the church open. But these functionaries, one and all, protested that they had not spoken of it. However it might have been, when Mr. Carlton and Laura arrived at the door in a close carriage, precisely one minute before nine, they were horror-struck to find themselves in the midst of a dense crowd, extending from the street up to the very altar-rails, and through which they had to pick their way.

"Rather a strong expression that," sneers some genial critic. "Horror-struck!" But it really did appear to apply to Mr. Carlton. Laura wore the handsome cashmere shawl which he had given her, the light silk dress sent by Jane, and a white bonnet and veil bought somewhere on her travels. She stood at the altar with downcast eyes and blushing cheeks, just as a young bride under the circumstances might be supposed to stand, never once looking at the throng, and apparently unheeding of them. Not so Mr. Carlton. He stood with a

ghastly face, into which the colour would not come by any effort of will, glancing over his shoulder perpetually, not at the offending crowd, whom Mr. Carlton regarded simply with anger and would have liked to duck wholesale in the nearest pond, but as if impelled by some imaginary fear. Did he dread the intrusion of his wife's father, Lord Oakburn? that he would, even at that useless and tardy hour, appear and forbid the ceremony? South Wennock, who prided itself upon its discernment, said so.

The superfluities of a groomsmen and a bridesmaid had not been provided by Mr. Carlton. The clerk performed the office of the one, and Laura dispensed with the other. The wedding ring was firmly placed upon her finger, and they turned from the altar as securely married as though there had been no previous runaway escapade. The licence had described her as Laura Chesney, otherwise Carlton, and it was so that she signed the book.

But there occurred an unlucky contretemps. The carriage waited at the church door, and Laura and Mr. Carlton had taken their seats in it on the conclusion of the ceremony, when, just as it was moving off amidst the dense mob of the gaping spectators, an open fly came from the opposite direction. It contained Lord Oakburn and his stick. The earl was on his way back to Chesney Oaks, was now being conveyed to Great Wennock to catch one

of the morning trains, Pompey on the box beside the driver, and a great portmanteau between Pompey's knees.

Perhaps nearly the only household in South Wennock to which the report of the morning's intended ceremony had not penetrated, was that of Cedar Lodge. Even such newsmongers as milk-women and baker's boys were chary of telling aught there that concerned its runaway daughter. When, therefore, Lord Oakburn saw the crowd round the church, he looked at it in surprise, wondering what was afoot, and then he caught sight of the inmates of the close carriage about to be driven away from its doors. His daughter's terrified gaze met his.

Lord Oakburn's brow flushed red with passion. In his hot temper he raised his stick with a menacing gesture, as if he would have beaten one of them, bride or bridegroom, perhaps both, had he been near enough; or as if he meant to throw it at the carriage, as he sometimes threw it at Pompey. It did not go, however. He let it drop on the fly seat again, with a word that was certainly not a blessing; and the fly went on, and the meeting was over.

There was no fear on Mr. Carlton's countenance. Triumph now. The unnaturally pale hue which had overspread it during the ceremony had given place to its usual aspect, and he felt more inclined

to laugh in Lord Oakburn's face than to fear him. Even the earl could not part them now.

Mr. Carlton entered his home with his wife. He snatched a hasty breakfast, and then started on his visits to his patients, who were in a state of rebellion, deeming themselves greatly aggrieved by the past week's unaverted absence. In the course of the morning his way took him past the police-station. Standing at its door was a middle-aged man, with an intelligent face and small snub nose, who looked at Mr. Carlton as he passed with that quiet regard that keen men, curious as to their neighbour's movements, sometimes display. It was Medler, the new inspector. The surgeon had gone some yards beyond the building, when he, perhaps recollecting the previous night's interview, wheeled round and spoke.

"Can I see the inspector?"

"You see him now," was the answer. "I am he."

"I am told you want me," returned the surgeon. "Mr. Carlton," he added in explanation, finding he was not known.

"Oh, ah, yes, sir; I beg your pardon," said the inspector, intelligence replacing the questioning expression of his face. "Be so kind as to step inside."

He shut himself in a little bit of a room with Mr. Carlton, a room not much bigger than a short

passage. The surgeon had been in it once before. It was when he had gone to give what information he could to the previous inspector, relative to the business for which he was now brought there again.

"I don't know any more than I did before," he observed, after alluding to the policeman's visit to him the previous night. "I gave the police at the time of the death all the information I possessed upon the matter—which was not much."

"Yes, sir, it's not that. I did not suppose you had come into possession of more facts. What I want with you is this—to relate to me quietly all that you know about it, as you did to my predecessor. I fear the affair has been mismanaged."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure it has," continued Mr. Medler, improving upon his former assertion. "If the thing had been followed up properly, it might have been brought to light at the time. That's my opinion."

"It is not mine," dissented Mr. Carlton. "I do not see that anything more could be done than was done."

"Why, they never unearthed that Mrs. Smith, the woman who came down and took away the child! Never found out anything about her at all!"

"True," said Mr. Carlton. "They went to a hundred Mrs. Smiths, or so, in London, without

finding the right one. And the conclusion they arrived at was, that Smith was not her name at all, but one she had assumed for the purpose of the visit here."

"It was the name by which the sick lady wrote to her on the night of her arrival, at all events," remarked the officer, with a nod that seemed to say he had made himself master of the whole business.

"But that may have been only part of a concerted plan. One thing appears to be indisputable—that the lady came down with the determination of remaining unknown. For my part, I am inclined to think that she did not come from London at all; that the woman Smith—if Smith was her name—did not come from London. I believe that all that was said and done here was done with one motive—to blind us."

Mr. Carlton was leaning with his elbow on the narrow table, or counter, that ran along the wall, as he said this, slightly stooping, and making marks with the point of his umbrella on the floor. The inspector, watchful by nature and by habit, became struck with a sudden change in his face. A shiver seemed to pass over it.

"It is the most miserable business I ever had to do with," he said, lifting his eyes to the officer's; "I heartily hope I shall never become personally cognisant of such another. People persisted in mixing

me up with it, just because Mrs. Crane was thought to have said that some friends recommended her to me as her medical attendant."

"And you cannot find that any-one did so recommend you?"

"I cannot. I wrote to all the friends and acquaintances I possess in town, inquiring if they had recommended any lady to me; but could find out nothing. None of them so much as knew a Mrs. Crane."

"I think it is by no means sure that her name was Crane," remarked Mr. Medler.

"Just so. Any more than that the other one's name was Smith. There's nothing sure about any part of the business, except the death. That, poor thing, is sure enough."

"What is your own opinion, Mr. Carlton?" inquired the inspector, his tone becoming confidential. "Your private one, you know."

"As to what?"

"The cause of death. Of course we all know it was caused by the sleeping draught," he rapidly continued; "but I mean as to the fatal drug introduced into that draught—who put it in?"

"My opinion is—but it is not a pleasant task to have to avow it, even to you—that it was so mixed, inadvertently, by Stephen Grey. It is impossible for me to come to any other conclusion. I cannot

imagine how two opinions upon the point can have arisen."

The inspector shook his head, as if he could not agree with Mr. Carlton ; but he made no dissent in words. He did not believe the fault to lie with Stephen Grey.

"What I wished more particularly to ask you, sir, was about the man you saw on the stairs," he presently resumed. "*There's* the point that ought to have been followed up."

"I saw no man on the stairs," said Mr. Carlton. "I did fancy I saw a face there, it's true ; but I have come to the conclusion that it was only fancy, that my sight was deceived by the moonbeams."

"Will you swear there was no man there ? "

"Well, no ; I should not like to do that. Nevertheless, my firm belief is that there was no man there, no face at all ; I think my sight misled me."

The inspector lifted his finger and shook it, by way of adding impressiveness to his words. "Rely upon it, sir, there *was* a man there, and that man is the one who did the mischief. I know—I know what you would say—that the draught smelt of the stuff when it arrived, as you testified ; but I don't care for that. It seems a difficult enough point to get over at first, but I have picked the case to pieces in all its bearings, and *I* have got over it. I don't attach an atom of importance to it."

"Do you think I should testify to what was not true?" asked Mr. Carlton.

"Not a bit of it," returned the inspector, with calm equanimity. "You'd be as anxious, naturally, to state the facts correctly, and throw as much light upon them, as we should. But I know how deceiving noses are. You fancied you smelt the poison in the draught, but you didn't really smell it, for it wasn't there. The nurse—what's her name? a fat woman—declares she could not smell anything of the sort; for I have had her before me here. She had been drinking a modicum of strong waters, I know; but they don't take all smell away in that fashion. Depend upon it her nose was truer than yours."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Carlton. "I am a medical man, remember, accustomed to the smell of drugs, and not likely to be deceived."

"That's just it," said the inspector, with persistent obstinacy. "Those accustomed to the smell of drugs, living amongst them, as may be said, in their surgeries, are more liable to fancy they smell them when they don't, than other folks are. There was no smell of poison in the draught when it was taken to the house," he doggedly continued.

"But I tell you there was," persisted Mr. Carlton.

"And I tell you, sir, there wasn't. There. I feel as sure of it as I am that we are now talking

together. That man you saw on the stairs was the one to drop the poison into the draught after you had gone."

Mr. Carlton said no more. The inspector was evidently confirmed in his opinion, and it was of no use to try to shake it. There may have come over Mr. Carlton's memory also a recollection of the *second* view he had obtained of the face, on the night previous to his flight with Laura Chesney. That, surely, could not have been fancy; for Laura testified to seeing it—and hearing it—as well as he. How then reconcile that with his persistent denial that no one had been on the stairs? Mr. Carlton could not tell; but he was quite sincere in hoping, nay, in half believing, that that ill-looking face had existed wholly in his imagination.

"Is that all you have to ask me?" he inquired of the inspector. "My time is not my own this morning."

"No, sir, not all. I want you to be so kind as just to relate the facts as they occurred under your notice. I have heard them from Mr. Stephen Grey, and from others; but I must hear them from you. It's surprising how a word from one witness and a word from another helps us on to a correct view of a case. You saw her for the first time, I believe, on the Sunday night. It's a pity but you had kept the note she wrote you!"

"Who was to think the note would ever be wanted?" rejoined Mr. Carlton. "But if I had kept it, it would have told nothing."

"Every word, every scrap of paper is evidence to those who have learnt to use it," was the answer. "Go on, sir."

Mr. Carlton complied. He related the facts, so far as they had come under his cognisance, not with the minuteness he had found himself obliged to use before the coroner, but with a clearness of detail that was quite satisfactory. The inspector listened attentively, and once or twice took something down in writing.

"That's all you know?" came the question when he had finished.

"That is all I know."

The inspector gently rubbed his nose with the feather end of his pen. He was in deep thought.

"The case would resolve itself into a very small compass but for two opposite points in it," he presently said. "The one, the exceeding improbability that it was Mr. Stephen Grey who made any mistake in the mixing-up; the other, that man's face you saw on the stairs. I can't get over those."

"But I have assured you there was no man's face on the stairs," reiterated Mr. Carlton.

"I don't doubt that you believe so now. But you didn't believe so at the time, or you'd not have

spoken about it to the widow Gould. Present impressions are worth everything, believe me, Mr. Carlton; and it is to that suspicious point I shall direct all my energies. I'd stake my place that somebody was there."

"As you please," said Mr. Carlton. "I suppose that is all you want with me."

"That's all, sir, and thank you. If we ferret out anything, you shall be one of the first to know it. Good morning."

Mr. Carlton, who was indeed pressed for time, and had inwardly rebelled at having to give so much of it to the police-station on that busy morning, hastened away the moment he was released. Crossing the street at railroad speed in a slanting direction past the church—for the police-station and St. Mark's Church were in pretty close contiguity—he sped round the corner near the Red Lion, in the direction that led to Great Wrenock, and dexterously escaped being run over by a carriage that was turning into the principal street.

Mr. Carlton, who was an observant man, looked at the inmate of the carriage—a stout lady, dressed in deep mourning. She bent her resolute face forward—for it was a resolute face, with its steady dark eyes, and its pointed chin—to look at him. She had seen the just-avoided accident, and her haughty eyebrows plainly asked why one, looking so

entirely a gentleman, should have subjected himself to it through such ungentlemanly speed. How little did she suspect he was one whose name to her was a bitter pill—the surgeon, Lewis Carlton !

Mr. Carlton sped on, thinking no more of the carriage and its occupant. He was on his way to a sick patient who lived in one of the few houses situate at this, the near end of the Great Wrenock road,—houses which had the gratification of witnessing day by day the frequent passing and repassing of the noted railway omnibus.

The carriage meanwhile slackened its speed as soon as it was round the corner, and the postboy, after looking up and down the street in indecision, turned round on his horse and spoke to the servant on the box, a staid, respectable-looking man, wearing as deep mourning as his mistress.

“ Which way must I turn ? ”

The servant did not know. He looked up and down the street—very uselessly, for that could tell him nothing—and caught sight of the swinging board of the Red Lion close at hand.

“ There’s an inn. You had better inquire there.”

The postboy drew his horses up to the inn door. Mrs. Fitch, who happened to be standing at it, moved forward ; but the old lady had let down the front window with a bang, and was speaking sharply to the servant.

"What's the matter Thoms? What are you stopping here for?"

Thoms turned his head back and touched his hat. "The postboy does not know the way, my lady. I thought we had better inquire at this inn." But the old lady was evidently one of an active, restless temperament, who liked to do things herself better than to have them done for her. Before Thoms—deliberate and stately as his mistress was quick—could speak to Mrs. Fitch, she had shot up the front window, sent down the other, had her own head out, and was addressing the landlady.

"Whereabouts is Cedar Lodge?"

Mrs. Fitch dropped her habitual curtsy. "It lies a little out out of the town, on the Rise——"

"Be so good as direct the postboy to it," interrupted the lady, with the air of one who is accustomed to command and be obeyed.

"You must turn your horses round, postboy," said Mrs. Fitch, moving nearer to him on the pavement. "Keep straight on through the town, and you will come to a very long and gentle hill, where there's a good deal of new building. That's the Rise, and Cedar Lodge is about half-way up it on the right hand."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Thoms, civilly; and the postboy turned his horses as directed, and bore on through the town.

He had passed quite through it, when he saw the long ascent before him. That Rise was three-quarters of a mile in length ; but all of it could not be seen from its base. On the left, standing alone, after the street was passed and before the gentle hill had begun, was a nice-looking white house. The lady inside the carriage bent forward and glanced at it. She had not heard Mrs. Fitch's directions, and she thought it might be the one of which she was in quest, Cedar Lodge.

At that moment a lady threw up one of the windows on the first floor, and looked out. It was Laura Carlton : and her eyes met those other eyes gazing from the carriage. Laura gave a suppressed shriek of recognition ; and the old lady, startled also, lifted her angry hand with a menacing gesture ; just as the Earl of Oakburn had lifted his, in the encounter earlier in the morning before St. Mark's Church.

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT TO CEDAR LODGE.

THE Earl of Oakburn's sojourn at Cedar Lodge had been a short one. He had but gone home for a day or two to discuss future plans with Jane ; or, rather, to inform Jane of his future plans, for he was one who discussed them only with his own will.

It would be necessary for him to let Chesney Oaks. He had succeeded to the British peerage, it is true ; but he had not succeeded to the broad lands, the proud rent-roll of an ordinary peer. A certain income he came into with the title as a matter of course ; an income which, in comparison with the straitened one of later days, appeared like a mine of incalculable wealth, and which would no doubt prove as such to him and Jane, with their simple and inexpensive habits. The earl just dead had had a large private fortune, which did not go with the title ; even with that, he had been reckoned a poor man for his rank. Yes, there would be nothing for it but to let Chesney Oaks, he observed to Jane. To keep up such a place as it ought to be

kept up would absorb the whole of his income, for it could not be done under three or four thousand a year. He should therefore let Chesney Oaks, and reside in London.

Jane's heart acquiesced in everything. But for the blow just dealt on them by Laura, she would have felt supremely happy. There had existed a dark spot in their domestic history for some little time past, but she had every hope that this change in their fortunes would remove it, and bring things straight again. It could not—she argued with herself—it could not be otherwise.

One word from Lord Oakburn would remove the cloud, would bring the wanderer home from an exile, voluntary at first, enforced now. And yet, Jane hesitated to beg that that word should be spoken. The subject had been a very bitter one; it had thrown the shadow of a constraint between Jane and her father, where until then all had been so open; and he had long ago interdicted all mention of the subject on Jane's part; but this rise in their fortunes rendered it necessary, as her plain good sense told her, that the interdict should no longer exist—that the matter should be opened again.

Not in that hour's visit to Chesney Oaks would Jane allude to it; when she went to impart to him the ill doings of one daughter, it was scarcely the

time to beg grace for another. But when Lord Oakburn came home on the Tuesday, the day following the funeral of the late peer, then Jane resolved to speak to him. How she shrank from it, none save herself could tell. His bitterness against Laura was so demonstrative that Jane was willing to let a day or two go on ere she entered upon the other bitter subject. "I will leave it until to-morrow," she thought; but when the morrow came (Wednesday), it brought Laura's letter about her clothes, and the earl went into so great an access of wrath, that Jane did not dare to speak. Still she could not let him go away again without speaking; and on the Thursday morning she took courage, as they were alone after breakfast, and the earl was giving her hurried orders about this and that—for the fly was already at the door to carry him away—she took courage and spoke quietly and pleadingly, though her heart was beating.

"Papa, forgive my speaking upon a forbidden subject. You will let me see after Clarice now?"

"What?" thundered the earl.

The tone was so stern, the countenance bent on Jane so dark in its anger, that all Jane's forced courage left her. Her manner grew hesitating; timid; imparting a notion of which she was painfully conscious—that she was asking something was not right to ask.

"Clarice," she faltered. "May we not send to her?"

"No," emphatically spoke the earl. "Hold your tongue, Jane. Send to her! Let Clarice come to her senses."

And that was all it brought forth. Lord Oakburn stepped into the fly, attended by Pompey, to be driven to Great Wennock railway station, and on his way to it enjoyed the pleasure of that encounter with his rebellious daughter and her husband as they quitted St. Mark's Church after their second marriage.

To make things clear to you, my reader, it may be necessary to revert for an instant to the past. Captain Chesney—we will speak of him by his old name, as it relates to the time he bore it—had four daughters, although you have only heard of three. He never had a son. Jane, Laura, Clarice, and Lucy were the names, Clarice being next to Laura. They were the two who seemed to stand together. Jane was considerably older, Lucy considerably younger, but Laura and Clarice were nearly of an age, there being only a year between them. When they were growing up, promising both of them to be of unusual beauty, though they were not much alike, the dowager Countess of Oakburn, who, in her patronising, domineering way, took a good deal of interest in her nephew Captain Chesney's family,

came forward with an offer to place them in France at her own cost for the completion of their education. Captain Chesney and Jane were too sensible of the advantages of such an offer to decline it, and Laura and Clarice were sent to France. When Lady Oakburn chose to do a thing, she did it well and liberally, and the small select Protestant school chosen, in the vicinity of Neuilly, was one eligible in all respects. The young ladies were well treated, well instructed, well cared for; and Laura and Clarice remained there for three years—Laura being nineteen, Clarice eighteen, when they returned.

They returned to a less comfortable home than the one they had quitted in France; for the embarrassments of Captain Chesney's house—then situated, as you may remember; in the neighbourhood of Plymouth—were at that time reaching their acme. The petty debts perpetually being pressed for, the straitened comforts of the *ménage*, the almost entire deprivation, through poverty, of the society and amusement so longed for at their age, tried their patience and tried their tempers. Jane bore all meekly for the sake of her father; Lucy was too young to feel it; but on Laura and Clarice it fell heavily.

Clarice was the first to break through the yoke. For two years she made the best of it; was in fact

obliged to make the best of it, for what else could she do?—but shortly after her twentieth birthday had passed, she suddenly announced her intention of going out as governess. And had she announced her intention of going round the country in a caravan to dance at fairs, it could not have been received with more indignant displeasure by her family.

Not by one of them only, but by all. Captain Chesney did not condescend to reason with her; he raved at her and forbade her. Jane reasoned; Laura ridiculed; but Clarice held to her own will. That she had a strong will of her own, that contention proved; a will as strong and obstinate as Captain Chesney's. It was in complete opposition to the high notions, the long-cherished pride of the well-born family, that one of its daughters should lower herself to the position of a dependent—a governess—a servant, it might be said, to the caprices of strangers less well born than she was. Clarice declared that she would be doing, as she believed, a right thing; her only motive was to *help* her family: first, by relieving them of her cost and maintenance; secondly, by applying part of her salary, if she should prove fortunate in getting a good one, to assist in the financial department at home.

That Clarice was sufficiently sincere in avowing

this to be her motive, there was no reason to doubt, for she believed it to be the chief one. But had she been capable of strictly analysing her own mind and feelings, it would perhaps have been found that she was also swayed at least in an equal degree by the desire of getting into a home where there would be less of discomfort. Be this as it might, Clarice quitted her home in quite as much disobedience and defiance as Laura was destined subsequently to quit it. There had been a few weeks spent in disputes and useless opposition, Clarice on one side, the whole family on the other; it ended in one violent bitter quarrel, and then Clarice left.

It might have been better had Lady Oakburn not interfered in it. She only added fuel to the flame. Kindness might have availed with Clarice; anger did not. And Lady Oakburn did not spare her anger, or her reproaches. It is true, that when she found these reproaches useless—that they only rendered Clarice more bent upon her plan—she changed her tactics and offered the young lady a home with her, rather than she should persist in what, according to their notions, reflected so much disgrace on the family. But it was then too late. Perhaps at no time would any one of the girls have been willing to accept a home with their domineering old aunt; and Clarice, in her high spirit, resented her present anger and interference too

greatly to do aught save send back the offer, with something that, to the indignant countess, looked like scorn. In the last angry scene, the one that occurred just before Clarice left, she affirmed, that no disgrace, through her, should ever be cast upon the family of Chesney; for she would change her name at once, and never betray her family to strangers. In her mad imprudence she took a vow so to act. In this mood she quitted her home; and Lady Oakburn immediately turned her anger upon Captain Chesney: he ought to have kept her in with cords, had it been necessary, she said, and not have suffered her to go away from home. It was next to impossible for Lady Oakburn not to vent her anger upon somebody; but in this case the captain was undeserving of it, for Clarice quitted the house in secret, and none knew of her departure until she had gone.

Opposition was over then. Lady Oakburn retreated into her pride, taking no further heed of the matter or of Clarice; Captain Chesney virtually did the same, and forbade the name of his offending daughter ever to be mentioned. In vain Jane pleaded that Clarice might be sought out; might at least be seen after, and one more effort made to induce her to hear reason, and return to her home. Captain Chesney would not listen, and quarrelled with Jane for her persistency. It was the first

coolness, the first unpleasantness, that had ever occurred between Jane and her father.

But, if they could only have put away the useless old family pride, there appeared to be not so great cause for uneasiness on the score of Clarice and the step she had taken. A very short time after Clarice left home, Jane received a letter from her, telling of her movements. She had obtained, she wrote, through a governess-agency house, a situation as governess, and had entered upon it. It was in a good family residing at the west end of London, where she should certainly be safe, and, she hoped, comfortable. She had changed her name, she added, though she should decline to say for what other; and if Jane wanted to write to her, she might send a letter directed to Miss Chesney, care of a certain library in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park. "Tell papa, with my love," ran the conclusion of the letter, "that he may thoroughly trust me in all ways; I will not disgrace myself or his name. What I have done I have done from good and loving motives, and I hope that the time may come when he will think of me less harshly."

Jane showed the letter to her father. He flew into a paroxysm of anger, and sent a harsh message to Clarice, to the effect that she should never come home again, and he would never forgive her; which message he compelled Jane to write. It would have

the effect of hardening Clarice, as Jane knew; but she could only obey. And from that hour Captain Chesney had interdicted all mention of Clarice by Jane.

But surely Jane had now a right to expect that the change in their position would cause her father to recall Clarice. She was Lady Clarice Chesney now, and the incongruity of a young lady of title being out as a governess must surely strike Lord Oakburn. To hear him thunder out: "No!" in answer to her appeal, with the added words, "let Clarice come to her senses," fell like a leaden weight on Jane's heart. Her private conviction was, that Clarice, obstinate in spirit and in temper, would not come to her senses of her own accord; unless they made the first move to bring her to them.

But Jane had not time just now to indulge her thoughts or her disappointment. In one week from that day, she and Lucy were to depart from their present home for Chesney Oaks, and there were innumerable things to see about; arrangements to make. Lord Oakburn had brought with him more than sufficient money to satisfy all outstanding claims, and this he left in Jane's hands, desiring her to pay them. With what satisfaction Jane gazed at this money, let those who have been unwilling debtors only picture. Ah, the rise in the

position was little—the rank they had stepped into, the high-sounding titles that must be theirs now for life—they were but little to Jane Chesney, as compared with this blessed power to pay the creditors—to be free from care!

With that delicacy of feeling which I think does in a large measure characterise the greater portion of people, not one creditor had presented himself at the door of Cedar Lodge since the change in Captain Chesney's fortunes. Of course there was a great deal in knowing now that they were secure. Jane was busy after breakfast giving directions in the house to Judith and the new woman-servant who had been temporarily engaged. Later she called Judith into the room that had been Laura's, to help to collect that young lady's things together.

"It is surely not worth while putting in these old shoes and boots," remarked Jane, in the midst of the packing. "She will never wear them again."

The words were spoken to Judith. Judith, however did not reply. She was standing at the window, looking out on the road.

"Judith."

Judith turned. "I beg your pardon, my lady. I was looking at a carriage that has stopped at the gate. There appears to be an old lady in it.

Lady Jane went to the window. It was the same carriage that so nearly ran over Mr. Carlton; the

same that pulled up at the Red Lion to inquire its way to Cedar Lodge. One glimpse was enough for Jane, and something like dismay mixed with the surprise that fell over her features.

"O Judith, run! Run down to receive her. It is my aunt, the dowager Lady Oakburn."

Judith did as she was bid. Jane hastily washed her hands, shook out the flounces of the new mourning worn for the late earl, glanced at the glass and smoothed down the braids of her fair hair—which never looked anything but smooth—and was below ere Lady Oakburn had entered the hall door.

She came in with short, quick steps, her high heels clattering on the flags of the hall. Although very stout, she imparted the idea of being a remarkably active woman—and in truth she was such: active in body, active in mind, active in tongue. And those active women wear well. Lady Oakburn, with her seventy years, did not look more than sixty.

"And now, where's your father?" she began, before she had time to receive Jane's salute; and the sharp tone of her voice caused Jane to know that something had displeased her.

"Papa's gone to Chesney Oaks, Aunt Oakburn," answered Jane, meekly waiting to receive the kiss of greeting. "He left us this morning."

"Yes. Your servant has just told me so," was

Lady Oakburn's answer. "And I should like to know what business he has to be darting about the country in this uncertain fashion? What took him off again so soon, pray?"


"Papa only came home to tell me of his plans and direct me what I was to do, aunt," replied Jane, in the deprecatory manner that habit, from early childhood, had rendered a matter of course. "He stayed here two nights."

The countess walked straight to an arm-chair in the drawing-room, drew it in front of the fire, sat down in it, kissed Lucy, who came running up, took off her bonnet, and handed it to Jane to put down. She was looking very cross.

"I reached Great Wennock last night on my way to Chesney Oaks, halted there, and slept. This morning, the first thing, I telegraphed to Chesney Oaks, asking whether the earl was there—your father. An hour ago the answer came back: "The earl is at Cedar Lodge, South Wennock;" and I ordered a post-carriage at once. And now that I am come here, I find him gone!"

"I am very sorry," said Jane. "Had it been yesterday, aunt, you would have found him."

"It is quite necessary that I should see him, Jane. Changes will have to be made at Chesney Oaks, and I intend to have a voice in them. Thoms! Where's Thoms?"



She suddenly jumped from her seat, flung open the room door, and her servant came forward. "What have you done with the carriage?" she asked.

"It is at the gate, my lady."

"Good. Let it wait. And now, Jane, if you have a biscuit and a glass of wine to give me, I'll take it, for I shall go on to Chesney Oaks as quickly as I can. A piece of bread and butter will do, if you have no biscuits."

Jane hastily got her the refreshment. "We were so grieved, Aunt Oakburn, to hear of the earl's death," she said; "as we had been to hear of the young countess's. Her we did not know; but Lord Oakburn——"

"Stay, Jane"—and the interruption was made in a tone strangely subdued, as contrasted with what had gone before it. "He was my grandson; I loved him for his dead father's sake; but he is gone, and I don't care to talk of him yet. He's gone, he's gone."

Jane did not break the silence. But Lady Oakburn was not one to give any time to superfluous emotion. She rapidly ate her biscuit, drank the wine, and called to Lucy to put down the glass.

"What are your father's plans, Jane? What does he mean to do with Chesney Oaks? He will not be rich enough to live at it."

"I believe he intends to let it, aunt."

"Let it! Let Chesney Oaks? That he never shall."

"What else can he do with it? As you say, aunt, he is not rich enough to live at it, and it would not do to let it lie empty, falling to decay through not being occupied."

Lady Oakburn lifted her hand. "To think that he should have succeeded, after all! Sailor Frank! I never—Jane, I declare to you that I never so much as gave a thought to it, all through my long life."

"And I can most truthfully say that we did not, aunt," was Jane's answer.

"What are you going to do? You will not stop here for long, I suppose?"

"We quit this for good in a week, and join papa at Chesney Oaks. After that I believe we shall go to London and settle there."

"Best plan," said Lady Oakburn, nodding her head. "London's the best, if you can't live at Chesney Oaks. But Frank shall never let it. What shall you do with this furniture?" she added, looking round at the very plain chairs and tables: "It won't do for you now."

"We have the house on our hands for some time longer: it was taken on a lease for three years. Papa says he shall let it furnished."

"And what of Laura?"

Jane's heart palpitated and her eyelids drooped, as the abrupt question was put. It was worse to talk of Laura to Lady Oakburn than to her father.

"It has been a terrible blow to us all," she breathed.

"Was she mad?"

"She was very foolish," answered Jane.

"Foolish!" returned the countess, in exasperation, "you call an act such as that only foolish! Where did you learn morals and manners, Lady Jane?"

Jane did not answer.

"What sort of a man is he, that Carlton? A monster?"

"He is not one in appearance, certainly," replied Jane, and had the subject been a less sad one she would have smiled. "I did not like him; apart from this unhappy business, I did not like him. They returned last night, and were remarried here this morning, I understand," she added, dropping her voice. "I fear—I do fear, that Laura will live to regret it."

"It's to be hoped she will," said the countess, in just the same tone that Lord Oakburn might have wished it. "I saw my young lady just now."

"You saw her, aunt?"

"I did," said Lady Oakburn, nodding her head,

"and she saw me. She was at the window of a house as I passed it: Mr. Carlton's, I suppose. Mark me, Jane! she will live to repent it; these runaway matches don't bring luck with them. Where's Clarice?"

The concluding question was put quite as abruptly as the one had been regarding Laura. Jane lifted her eyes, and the flush of excitement stole into her cheek.

"She is where she was, I conclude, Aunt Oakburn."

"And where's that? You may tell me all you know of her proceedings since she left home."

It was certainly condescending of the dowager to allow this, considering that, since the departure of Clarice from her home, she had never permitted Jane to mention her in any one of her letters.

"The 'all' is not much, aunt," said Jane. "You know that she sent us word she had entered on a situation in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park——"

"And that she had assumed a false name," interrupted the countess, with acrimony. "Yes, I know so much. Go on."

"That she had changed her name," said Jane, wincing at the plain statement of the case. "But she desired her letters to be addressed 'Miss Chesney'; therefore I cannot see how she can have wholly dropped it."

"Who would write to her, pray?"

"I did," said Jane. "I thought it well that we should not all abandon her——"

"Abandon her!" again interposed the countess. "I think it was she who abandoned us."

"Well—yes, of course it was—but you know what I mean, aunt. I wrote to her occasionally, and I had a few letters from her. Papa never forbade that."

"And what did she say in her letters?"

"Not much; they were generally short ones. I expect they were written just to tell me that she was well and safe. She gave scarcely any particulars of the family she was with, but she said she was as comfortable there, on the whole, she supposed, as she could expect to be. But I have not heard from her since the beginning of the year, and I am getting uneasy about it. My two last letters have brought forth no reply: and they were letters that required one."

"She's coming home," said the countess. "You'll see."

"I wish I could think so," returned Jane. "But when I remember her proud spirit, a conviction comes over me that she will not make the first move. She will expect papa to do it."

"Then she should expect, for me, were I her father," tartly returned the dowager, as she rose


and put on her bonnet. "If she has no more sense of what is due to the Earl of Oakburn, and to herself as Lady Clarice Chesney, than to be out in the world teaching children, I'd let her stop out until her senses came to her."

Almost the same words as those used by the earl not many hours before. And the old Countess of Oakburn reiterated them again, as she said adieu to her grandnieces, and departed as abruptly as she had arrived.

CHAPTER III.

MISS LETHWAIT.

IN a magnificent reception-room of Portland Place sat the Earl of Oakburn and Lady Jane Chesney. It was the middle of June, and the London season was at its height. The whole of May, Lord Oakburn and his daughters had stayed at Chesney Oaks; he had now taken this house, furnished, for three months. Chesney Oaks was in the market to let: to let to anybody who would take it and pay rent for it; and the countess dowager had worked herself into a fume and a fret when she first saw the advertisement, and had come down upon the earl in a burst of indignation, demanding to know what he meant by disgracing the family. The earl answered her: he was quite capable of doing it; and a hot war of words waged for some minutes between them, and neither would give way. The earl had reason on his side, though; if his means were not sufficient to keep up Chesney Oaks, better that he should let it than allow it to go to ruin through unoccupation.



So Chesney Oaks was in the hire market, and old Lady Oakburn told her sailor nephew that he deserved to have his ears boxed, that she should never forgive him, and then she withdrew in dudgeon to her house in Kensington Gardens. And the earl devoutly wished she might never come out of it to torment him again.

Indeed there was scarcely a poorer peer on Great Britain's roll than the new Earl of Oakburn; but to him and to Jane this poverty was as very riches. His net revenue would be little, if any, more than three thousand per annum; as to the rent he expected to get from the letting of Chesney Oaks, it would nearly all go in keeping the place in proper repair. Chesney Oaks had no broad lands attaching to it; the house was good, and the ornamental gardens were good; but these are not the things that yield large revenues. The furniture of Chesney Oaks was the private property of the late earl; it reverted to his grandmother, the old countess. Had the present earl pleased her—that is, had he not offended her by advertising the place—she would very probably have made him a present of it, for she was capable of being generous when it suited her; but when she found the house was irrevocably to be let, she, in a fit of temper, gave orders for it to be taken out, and it was now in the course of removal. “I'll not leave a stick or a stone

in the place," she had said to Lord Oakburn in the stormy interview alluded to above. "I'd not use them if you did," retorted the exasperated earl, "and the sooner the things are out, the better." For one thing, the house was in admirable repair; the young earl having had it put in complete ornamental order twelve months before, on the occasion of his marriage. So the furniture passed out of Lord Oakburn's hands, when perhaps by a little diplomacy, which he was entirely incapable of exercising, it might have remained his; and the dowager was distributing it amidst her married daughters—who were too well off to care for it.

For a fortnight or more after Chesney Oaks was advertised, no applicant had applied for it. Then one came forward. It was Sir James Marden, a gentleman who was returning to Europe after a long sojourn in the East, and who had commissioned his brother, Colonel Marden, to engage for him a suitable residence. It was natural that the colonel should wish to secure one in the vicinity of his own; he lived at Pembury, and Chesney Oaks appeared to be the very thing, of all others. And the negotiations were proceeding satisfactorily.

The earl was talking to Jane about it now. He was no hard-bargain dealer. Generous by nature, he could not higgie and haggle, and stand out for pence and shillings and pounds, as so many do.

All he did, any transaction he might engage in, was set about in the most simple, straightforward manner imaginable. It would have occurred to most people to employ an agent to conduct this business of the letting; it did not occur to the earl. He wrote the advertisements out with his own hand, and he added to them his own name and address in full, as to where applications might be made. One or two interviews had taken place between him and Colonel Marden, who was staying with his family in town; and on the previous day to this morning on which the earl and his daughter were sitting together, Mrs. Marden had made her first call on Lady Jane, and they had grown in that short call quite intimate. Jane was now telling her father that she had promised to accompany Mrs. Marden to a morning concert that very day.

Jane was attired in mourning; a handsome black dress of a thin gauzy texture, ample and flowing. She was quiet and unpretending as ever, but there was a look of rest in her face now, that told of a heart at peace. The present life was a very haven to the careworn Jane, nearly tired out, as she had been, with the household contrivings, the economies, and the embarrassments of the former days. All the longing visions of Jane Chesney seemed more than realised; visions which had been indulged for her father, not for herself; and they had

been realised in a manner and to a degree that Jane had never dreamt of. He was at ease for the rest of his days, and she had nothing more left to wish for. Into society Jane determined to go very little. To be her father's constant companion, save when he was at his club or at the House, was her aim; formerly, household duties and Lucy's education called her perpetually from his side: it should not be so now. No attractions of society, of pleasure, of the gay world without, should lure away Jane Chesney: she would remain her dear father's companion from henceforth, rendering his hours pleasant to him, taking care that things were well ordered in his home. Never perhaps has father been loved and revered as was this one by Jane Chesney; and, as mistress of his plentiful home, as mistress of her own time, which she would dedicate to him, she seemed to have realised her Utopia.

Though talking with her father on the subject of Chesney Oaks and Sir James Marden's probable tenancy of it, an under-current of ideas was floating in Jane's mind. She was about engaging a governess for Lucy; that is, she was looking out for one; and on the previous day Mrs. Marden had mentioned a lady to her who was in search of a fresh situation—one whom Jane thought would be likely to suit.

"You are quite sure, papa, that you have overgot

your objection to our taking a resident governess ?” Jane said to him in a pause of the other subject. For it should be made known that the earl had declared, when Jane had first broached the matter, that he would have no strange ladies in his house, putting him out of his way: and he had very grumblingly conceded the point, upon Jane’s assuring him that no governess should be allowed to do that in the remotest degree.

“ Didn’t I say so ?” testily returned the earl, who had lost none of his abruptness of manner. “ Why do you ask ? ”

“ Because Mrs. Marden mentioned one to me, who is about quitting her present situation. By the description, I thought she appeared to be just the person we want for Lucy. If you have no objection, papa, I will inquire further about her.”

“ Lucy would have been just as well at school,” said the earl.

“ Oh, papa, no !” and Jane’s tone was one of pain. “ I should not like her to be moved from under my supervision. You know I have been as her mother ever since mamma died. Neither do I think you would like to part with her.”

“ Have it as you will,” said the earl, his voice somewhat more conciliatory. “ If you think the woman will do, let her sign articles.”

Jane smiled. But before she could answer, a

servant came into the room and said a lady was waiting to see her.

"Who is it?" asked Jane.

"I thought she said Miss Lethwait, my lady, but I am not sure that I caught the name aright, though I asked twice," was the man's answer.

Jane left the room to receive her visitor. "Lethwait?" she repeated to herself, "Lethwait?—surely that was the name of the governess mentioned by Mrs. Marden! I suppose she must have sent her here."

A tall and very elegant woman of seven or eight-and-twenty rose from her chair as Jane entered. In features she was plain, but there was something really magnificent about her dark eyes and hair, about her manner altogether. Jane bowed; and concluded she had been mistaken in supposing it to be the governess.

But the governess it was, Miss Lethwait. Mrs. Marden had informed her that she had spoken to Lady Jane Chesney on her behalf, and Miss Lethwait had deemed it best to call at once, lest some other applicant should supersede her. She was a clergyman's daughter, she informed Jane, and had been educated for a governess. Her father had judged it better to give his children an education by which they might make their way in the world, she said, than to put by the money it would cost, to

be divided amongst them at his death. It would be but a few hundreds at best, not sufficient to do them much good. Jane inquired why she was leaving her present situation, and was told that it was the amount of work which was driving her away. She had five pupils there, and taught them everything.

"You will require a high salary, probably?" Jane said, after a few minutes' pause, during which she had been thinking how much she should like to engage Miss Lethwait.

Miss Lethwait hesitated in her reply. She had been told by Mrs. Marden that Lady Jane had intimated she should not be able to pay a very high one.

"I receive eighty guineas where I am, madam," she at length answered. "But in consideration of there being only one pupil, I would willingly accept less. Were I to continue to work as I am doing now, I am sure that my health would seriously suffer. I am frequently up until past twelve, correcting exercises which I have not time to do in the day, and I am obliged to rise at six to superintend the practising."

Jane could with truth assure her that there would be no overworking in her home—if she came into it; and when Miss Lethwait quitted the house, she was engaged, subject to references.

She had barely gone when Mrs. Marden called, a

pretty little woman with a profusion of auburn hair. Jane saw her with surprise. An appointment had been made for them to meet at half-past one, but it was yet only half-past twelve. Mrs. Marden had come to tell Jane she would probably receive a visit from Miss Lethwait. Jane replied that she had been already ; and grew eloquent in her praise.

"I like her very much indeed," she said. "She appears to me to be well qualified in every way ; an unusually desirable person to fill such a post. Mrs. Marden, I wonder you were not anxious to secure her for your own children!" she added, the idea striking her.

Mrs. Marden laughed. "The governess I have suits me very well," she answered. "She is not perfection ; I don't know who is ; you may not find Miss Lethwait to be so."

"No, indeed," said Jane.

"Miss Jones is patient and efficient," continued Mrs. Marden. "At least she is efficient while my children are at their present ages—scarcely out of the nursery ; but she is not a finished linguist and musician, as is Miss Lethwait."

"I wonder," cried Jane, the thought striking her, "whether she is a daughter of the Reverend Mr. Jones, of South Wennock ?"

"No, I am sure she is not. She observes a complete silence as to her relatives : never will speak of

them. I once told her I did not believe Jones was her real name," continued Mrs. Marden, laughing. "She *said* it was ; but I declare I'd not answer for it. She acknowledged that there were circumstances connected with her family which rendered her unwilling to speak of them: and she never has done so. However, the lady who recommended her to me, a schoolmistress of position, answered for her thorough respectability, and so I am content to let Miss Jones keep her mystery."

The words had struck on a chord in Jane Chesney's heart never wholly dormant. Was it possible that this governess could be her sister Clarice? *She*, as Jane had every reason to suppose, had changed her name when she left her home, and she had repeated to Jane in her letters the assurance—reiterating it, half in anger, half in deprecatory excuse, but wholly in earnest—that *never* through her should the name of that family be known.

"What sort of a lady is Miss Jones?" asked Jane, all too eagerly. "Is she young?"

"She is young, and very pretty. So pretty that were my sons grown up I might think her a dangerous inmate. Why?"

"And how long has she been with you?"

"How long?—nearly two years, I think," said Mrs. Marden, struck with Lady Jane's sudden

interest, and wondering what could be its cause.

"Why do you ask?"

Every word seemed to add to the probability. In a month's time it would be two years since Clarice quitted her home.

"Can you tell me her Christian name?" Jane asked, paying no heed to Mrs. Marden's question.

"Her Christian name?" repeated Mrs. Marden. "Well, now, it never struck me until this minute that I do not remember ever to have heard it. Stay! she signs her receipts for salary 'C. Jones;' I remember that. Possibly it may be Caroline."

"Do you suppose it is Clarice?" asked Jane, her lips parted with emotion.

"Clarice? It may be. But that is an uncommon name. May I again inquire, Lady Jane, why you ask? You appear to have some interest in the subject."

"Yes," said Jane, recalled to a sense of the present. "I—I knew a young lady who went out as governess nearly two years ago, and I am wishing much to find her. I think—I *think* it may be the same."

"Was her name Jones?"

"No, it was not. But I believe that the young lady I mention assumed another name in deference to the prejudices of her family, who did not like that she, bearing theirs, should be known as a

governess. Excuse my giving further particulars, Mrs. Marden ; should Miss Jones prove to be the same, you shall hear them without reserve. Can you let me see her ? ”

“ Whenever you please,” was Mrs. Marden’s answer. “ Now, if you like. My carriage is at the door, and if you will come home with me and take luncheon she will be at the table with the two eldest girls, for they make it their dinner. After that, we will go straight to the concert.”

Jane needed no second invitation, but attired herself without delay. A thought crossed her of whether this would not be incurring the displeasure of her father, who had so positively forbidden her see after Clarice ; but for once in her life Jane risked it. Though she would not disobey him to the length of setting afloat a search in defiance of his expressed command that Clarice should be “ let alone until she came to her senses,” Jane was beginning to grow seriously uneasy respecting her wandering sister. It seemed very improbable that Clarice should have remained in ignorance of the change in their position ; why, then, did she not communicate with them ?

Colonel Marden’s residence in London, a house he had taken for the season, was in one of the terraces near Hyde Park ; and Mrs. Marden and Jane were soon driven to it. A few minutes of suspense

for Jane, and Mrs. Marden, accompanied by a young lady, came into the drawing-room.

"This is Miss Jones, Lady Jane."

With a beating heart—with lips that were turning to whiteness in the agitation of expectancy, Jane turned. Turned to behold—disappointment.

It was a very pretty, lady-like young woman, but it was not Clarice Chesney. A few moments elapsed before Jane recovered her calmness.

"I beg your pardon for troubling you, Mrs. Marden," she said then; "but this is not my friend. I have lost sight of a young lady who went out as governess," she added, by way of a word of explanation to Miss Jones, in the innate good breeding that never left her, "and I was wondering whether I might find her in you. I wish it had been so."

The subject was at an end. Poor Jane could not recover herself. She remained as one whose senses are lost.

"You are disappointed, Lady Jane!" exclaimed Mrs. Marden as they took their places in the carriage to be driven to the concert.

"I acknowledge that I am," was the low-breathed answer.

"You will forget it in the treat that is in store for you," said Mrs. Marden.

And in truth, if musical strains in their greatest

perfection, their sweetest harmony, can lure a heart away from its care, it was the music they were about to hear that day. The concert was given by that great master of the harp, Frederick Chatterton; and when they entered, nearly every seat was occupied, every nook and corner crammed. One of the most distinguished audiences ever collected within walls had assembled; for harp music, such as that, is not common music.

And Jane was beguiled out of her care. As she listened to the brilliant playing, the finished touch, the sweet tones elicited from the instrument, she forgot even Clarice. Never had she heard music like unto it. The "*Remembranza d'Italia*," the "*Reminiscences of Bellini*," melted Jane to tears, while the finale from "*La Felia*" half took her breath away. For ordinary music Jane did not care; but music such as this wrought an effect on her that did not pass easily.

"Lucy must learn the harp; Lucy must learn the harp!" were the first words she ejaculated.

"What did you say?" asked Mrs. Marden.

"I—I believe I was unconscious that I spoke aloud. I should like my little sister to learn to play on this instrument."

"The most graceful instrument there is, and I think the sweetest," said Mrs. Marden, warmly. "I told you you would have a treat."

"Oh, I cannot tell you what it is to me!" was Jane's answer. Very rarely indeed was she moved to express herself so eloquently on any subject; but poor Jane had not been in the way of hearing much good music; never such as this.

As they were going out, pressing their way along with the throng, they encountered Miss Lethwait, who was there with her pupils. Jane addressed her, speaking more impulsively than was her wont.

"Do you teach the harp, Miss Lethwait?"

"I could teach it, madam," replied Miss Lethwait, after a momentary pause. "I learnt it, but have been out of practice for some years."

"Take my advice, Lady Jane," whispered Mrs. Marden, when Miss Lethwait was beyond hearing. "If you are thinking of your sister, as I conclude, have her taught by the master you have just heard. It will be money well laid out."

"I believe you are right," answered Jane.

She shook hands with Mrs. Marden outside, and proceeded home, alone and on foot. It was not far, once the crossing at the Oxford Circus was accomplished. Those street crossings were the worst interludes as yet in Jane's London life. As she went on, her brain was busy with many thoughts and themes. Miss Lethwait, the coveted governess for Lucy; the disappointment she had met with in Miss Jones; the doubt whether she should not

venture to urge on her father the necessity there seemed to be of their seeking out Clarice: all were floating together in her mind, presenting a thousand phases, as thought will do when the brain is troubled. And mixed up with them in the most incongruous manner were those enchanting harp melodies just heard, the strains of which lingered on Jane Chesney's ears.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISSING SLEEVES.

MR. CARLTON stood before the ornamented summer grate of his handsome drawing-room. He had come in from his round of afternoon visits, and ran up-stairs in the expectation of finding his wife. She was not there, and he rang the bell. It was answered by Sarah, a damsel with rather an insolent face and a very fine cap worn behind instead of before.

"Is your lady not in?"

"Not yet, sir. She went out at three o'clock to pay visits."

"On foot?"

"Oh no, sir. The carriage was ordered round from Green's."

The girl, finding she was not questioned further, retired, and Mr. Carlton walked to the window, and stood looking from it, probably for his wife; his hands were in his pockets, and he was softly whistling. A certain sign with Mr. Carlton—the whistling—that he was deep in thought. Possibly

the unpleasant idea that had crossed his mind once or twice of late, was crossing it again now—namely, that if he and his wife did not take care they should be outrunning their income. In good truth, Laura possessed little more innate notion of the value of money than did her father, and she was extravagant in many ways in her new home from sheer heedlessness, where there was not the slightest necessity that she should be so at all. This very fact of ordering round one of Green's carriages two or three times a week when she went to pay visits, was a superfluous expense, for Laura could just as well have gone on foot, her visits being generally to friends in the vicinity of home: when she paid them in the country it was with Mr. Carlton. Two, three, four hours, as the case might be, would Laura be out in that carriage, keeping it waiting at different doors for her while she was gossiping; and entailing a cost frequently of six, or eight, or ten shillings.

“Circumstances alter cases.” The trite old saying could not have received a more apt exemplification than in the instance of Mr. Carlton and his wife. It was not the most reputable thing that they had done—the running away to be married without leave or licence. More especially was it not so on the part of the young lady, and South Wennock would no doubt have turned the cold

shoulder on her for a time, to show its sense of the irregularity, and vouchsafed her no visits, had she continued to be the obscure daughter of the poor post-captain. But Miss Laura Chesney was one person; the Lady Laura was another. That poor post-captain had become one on the proud list of British peers, and his daughter, in right of her rank, was the highest dame in all South Wennock. In fact there was no other lady whose social position in any degree approached to it. And South Wennock went but the common way of the world, when it obligingly shut its eyes to the past escapade, and hastened to pay its court to the earl's daughter. The Widow Gould had given it as her opinion at the inquest, you may remember, that Mr. Carlton's "cabriolly" was an element in his success; but the probabilities were that Mr. Carlton's bride would prove a greater one.

All the town—at least as much of it as possessed the right, or fancied they possessed it—flocked to pay court to the Lady Laura Carlton. Many of the county families, really of account, drove in to call upon her and Mr. Carlton; people who would never have dreamt of according him the honour, but that his new wife was a peer's daughter. Had she been marshalled to church by her father and duly married, converted into a wife with the most orthodox adjuncts—three clergymen and twelve bridesmaids

—her new friends could not have treated her with more deferential respect. Such is the world, you know. The Lady Laura Carlton was just now the fashion, and the Lady Laura was nothing loth to be so.

But, to be the fashion entails usually certain consequences in the shape of expense. Dress and carriages cost something. Laura, with her innate carelessness, ordered both whenever inclination prompted, and Mr. Carlton was beginning to remember that they must be paid for. Passionately attached to his wife, he could not yet bear to give her a word of warning to be more heedful, but he wrote to his father, and solicited money from him. Not a sum of money down : he asked for something to be allowed him annually—a certain fixed sum that he named ; hinting that the wife he had married, being an earl's daughter, would cost him more to maintain suitably than a wife would, taken from an ordinary rank.

To this letter Mr. Carlton was daily expecting an answer. He had duly forwarded an account of his marriage to Mr. Carlton the elder ; had written to him once since ; but the senior gentleman had been remiss in the laws of good breeding, and had sent not so much as a single congratulation in return. In point of fact, he had not written at all. But Mr.

Carlton was confidently expecting a reply to his third letter.

He had not to wait long. As he stood there at the drawing-room window, he saw the postman come up and turn in at the gate, selecting a letter from his bundle. There were two deliveries a-day from London—morning and evening; South Wennock, after a fight with the post-office powers, had succeeded in obtaining the concession at the beginning of the year. Mr. Carlton ran down with a step so fleet that he opened the front door as the postman was about to ring at it.

The letter was from his father; he saw that by the handwriting; and the postman had turned back and was going out at the gate again when Mr. Carlton remembered something he wished to ask, called to him, and followed him to the gate, speaking.

“Rodney, have you made any inquiry about that overcharge in the books sent to me the other morning?”

“We have had to write up about it, sir; it wasn't the fault of the office here,” was the man's answer. “The answer will be down most likely to-morrow.”

“I shan't pay it, you know.”

“Very good, sir. If it's a wrong charge they'll take it off.”

The surgeon had turned his attention to the

letter, when a sound of carriage-wheels was heard, and he stepped outside the gate, thinking it might be his wife, driving up. It was not. The carriage, however, contained two ladies whom Mr. Carlton knew, and he saluted them as they passed. The next moment there came in view the inspector, Medler, walking along with rapid strides. Had he been in pursuit of some runaway forger, he could scarcely have been advancing more eagerly. Catching the eye of Mr. Carlton, he made a sign to him, and increased his pace to a run.

"What now, I wonder?" muttered the surgeon to himself aloud: and the tone of his voice betrayed unconscious irritation. "Haven't they had enough of the matter yet?"

Mr. Carlton alluded to the very unsatisfactory matter of the death in Palace Street. Mr. Medler had not proved more clever in pursuing it than the inspector he had superseded, and he had been fain to give it up for the present as an unfathomable job. It was a warm day, for summer was in, and the inspector, a stout man, took off his hat to wipe his brows as he reached Mr. Carlton.

"We want you to be so good as make the examination, sir, of a poor woman that's gone off her head, so as to give the necessary certificate, and Mr. John Grey will sign it with you," began the inspector, rather incoherent in his haste and heat.

"We can't move her until we've got it. It's the blacksmith's wife down Great Wrennock Road."

"Very well," said the surgeon. "What has sent her off her head?"

"It's an old thing with her, I hear. Mr. Grey tells me she was obliged to be placed in confinement some years ago. Anyway, she's very violent now. You'll see her then, sir, some time this evening, and we'll get her moved the first thing in the morning? I ordered one of my men to come down to you before I left the station, but as I've seen you myself it's all the same. What glorious weather this is!"

"Very. We shall have a fine haymaking."

"By the way, Mr. Carlton, that affair seems completely to baffle us," resumed the inspector, "halting again as he was about to continue his way."

"What affair?" asked Mr. Carlton.

"About that Mrs. Crane. I'm afraid it's going to turn out one of those crimes that are never unearthed—there have been a few such. The fact is, if a thing is not properly followed up at the time of occurrence, it's not of much use to reopen it afterwards; I have often found it so."

"I suppose you have given this up, then?"

"Yes, I have. There seemed no use in keeping it open. Not but that in one sense it always is open, for if anything fresh concerning it should

come to our ears, we are ready for it. It may come yet, you know, sir."

Mr. Carlton nodded assent, and the inspector, with all the speed of which his two legs were capable, set off again in pursuit of his errand, whatever that might be. Mr. Carlton went indoors, turned into the dining-room, and broke open his letter. A dark frown gathered on his brow as he read it. Let us peep over his shoulder.

"DEAR LEWIS,—I will thank you not to trouble me with any more begging letters: you know that I never tolerated them. I advised you to marry, you say: true, but I did not advise you to marry a nobleman's daughter, and I never should have thought you foolish enough to do so. These unequal matches bring dissatisfaction in a hundred ways, as you will find—but that of course is your own and the lady's look-out. It is not my intention to give you any more money at all; and whether I shall leave you any at my death depends upon yourself. I am quite well again, and am stronger than I have been for years.

"Sincerely yours,

"*London, June, 1848.*"

"J. CARLTON.

Mr. Carlton crushed the letter in his hand with an iron pressure. He knew what that hint of the

after inheritance meant—that if he asked for any again he would never touch a farthing of it.

“He has ever been a bad father to me!” he passionately cried; “a bad, cruel father.”

The sight of his wife's hired carriage at the door interrupted him. He thrust the letter into one of his pockets and hastened out.

“I must manage to get along as well as I can,” he thought, “but *she* shall not suffer. Laura, my dearest, I thought you had run away!” he exclaimed, as she jumped lightly out of the carriage with her beaming face, and caught his smile of welcome.

“Where do you think I have been, Lewis?”

“To half a hundred places.”

“Well, so I have,” she laughed. “But I meant only one of those places. Ah, you'll never guess. I have been to our old home, Cedar Lodge. I had been paying visits on the Rise, and as I drove back the thought came over me that I would go in to the old house and look at it. The woman in charge did not know me; she took me for a lady really wanting the house. It's the servant they engaged after I left home, I found; she is to stop in it until the house is let. It is in apple-pie order; all the old tables and chairs in their places, and a few new ones put in to freshen the rooms up. Only fancy, Lewis! the woman gave me a card with the Earl of

Oakburn's town address upon it, and said I could write there, or apply here to Mr. Fisher, the agent, whichever was most agreeable to me."

Laura laughed merrily as she spoke. She had turned into the dining-room with Mr. Carlton, and was untying the white strings of her bonnet. He was smiling also, and there was nothing in his countenance to betray aught of the checkmate, the real vexation recently brought to him; few faces betrayed emotion, whether of joy or pain, less than the impassive one of Mr. Carlton.

"I wonder the earl should attempt to let the house furnished," he remarked. "I have wondered so ever since I saw the board up, advertising it."

"Papa took it on a long lease," said Laura. "I suppose he could not give it up if he would. Lewis, what else do you think I have done?—accepted an impromptu invitation to go out to-night."

"Where?"

"To that cross old Mrs. Newberry's. But she has her nieces staying with her, the most charming girls, and I promised to go up after dinner. Half-a-dozen people are to be there, all invited in the same impromptu manner, and we are going to act charades. Will you come?"

"I will take you, and come for you in the evening. But I have patients to see to-night."

Laura scarcely heard the answer. She had lost

none of her vanity, and she eagerly made her way to her dressing-room, her head full of what her attire for the evening should be.

Throwing her bonnet, which she had carried upon her arm by its strings, on the sofa, slipping her shawl from her shoulders, Laura opened her drawers and wardrobe, and turned over dresses and gay attire. She was all excitement. Loving gaiety much, any little unexpected accession to it put her almost in a fever.

"I'll wear this pearl-grey silk," she decided at length. "It will be quite sufficient mourning if we manage to put a bit of black ribbon on the point-lace sleeves. Sarah must contrive it somehow. Where are they?"

The "where are they" applied to the sleeves just mentioned. A pair of really beautiful sleeves that had belonged to Mrs. Chesney. Laura pulled open a drawer where her laces and fine muslins were kept, and turned its contents over with her white and nimble fingers.

"Now what has Sarah done with them?" she exclaimed, as the sleeves did not appear to show themselves. "She is as careless as she can be. If those sleeves are lost——"

Laura broke off her words and flew to the bell, ringing it so sharply that it echoed through the house. Laura had inherited her father's impatient

temper, and the girl flew up; she knew that her mistress brooked no delay in having her demands attended to. This girl had been engaged as house-maid, but her mistress kept her pretty well employed about her own person. She entered the room to see drawers open, dresses, and laces scattered about in confusion, and their owner watching for her in some excitement.

"Where are my point-lace sleeves?"

"Point-lace sleeves, my lady?" repeated Sarah, some doubt in her accent, as if she scarcely understood which were the point-lace sleeves. At least that was how Lady Laura interpreted the tone.

"Those beautiful sleeves of real point, that were mamma's," explained Laura, angrily and impatiently. "I told you how valuable they were; I ordered you to be always particularly careful in tacking them into my dresses. Now you know."

"Yes, I remember, my lady," replied Sarah. "They are in the drawer."

"They are not in the drawer."

"But they must be, my lady," persisted the girl, somewhat pertly, for she had as sharp a temper as her mistress. "I never put the laces by in any place but that."

"Find them, then," retorted Laura.

The maid advanced to the drawer, and began taking up one thing after another in it, slowly and

carefully; too slowly for the impatience of Lady Laura.

"Stand aside, Sarah, you won't have finished by dinner-time, at that rate," she cried. And, taking hold of the drawer with her own hands, she pulled it completely out, and turned it upside down on the carpet. The sheet of newspaper laid at the bottom was shaken out with the rest of the contents.

"Now then, put them back," said Laura. "You'll soon see whether I tell you truth, in saying the sleeves are not there."

Sarah suppressed her passion; she might not give way to it if she cared to keep her place. She snatched up the sheet of paper, gave it a violent shake, which might be set down to either zeal in the cause or anger, as her mistress pleased, and then stooped to pick up the lace articles. Lady Laura stood by watching the process, in anticipation of her own triumph and Sarah's discomfiture.

"Now, pray, are the sleeves there?" she demanded, when so few things remained on the floor that there could be no doubt upon the point.

"My lady, all I can say is, that I have neither touched nor seen the sleeves. I remember the sleeves, it's true; but I can't remember when they were worn last, or what dress they were worn in. If I took them out of the dress after they were used, I should put them nowhere but here."

"Do you suppose I lost them off my arms?" retorted Lady Laura.

Sarah did not say what she supposed, but she looked as though she would like to say a great deal, and not of the civilest. As she whirled the last article off the floor, which happened to be a black lace scarf, Lady Laura saw what appeared to be a part of a note, that had been lying underneath the things. She caught it up as impatiently as her maid had caught up the scarf, and far more eagerly; the writing on it, seen distinctly, was arousing all the curiosity and amazement that her mind possessed.

She forgot the lost sleeves, she forgot her anger at Sarah, she forgot her excitement; or, rather, the one source of excitement was merged into another, and she sat down with the piece of paper in her hand.

It was the commencement of a letter, written, as Laura believed, to her sister Jane, and was dated from London the 28th of the past February. The lower part of the note had been torn off, only the commencement of the letter and its conclusion on the reverse side being left. Laura knew the handwriting as well as she knew her own: it was that of her sister Clarice.

"I did not think Jane could have been so sly!" she exclaimed at length. "Protesting to me, as she

did, that Clarice had not written to her since New Year's day. What could be her motive for the denial?"

Laura sat on, the paper in her hand, and lost herself in thought. The affair, trifling as it was, puzzled her excessively; the few words on the note puzzled her, Jane's conduct in denying that she had heard, puzzled her. She had always deemed her sister the very essence of truth.

"People are sure to get found out," she exclaimed, with a laugh at her own words. "Jane little thought when she was packing my things to send to me that she dropped this memento amongst them. I'll keep it to convict her."

In turning to reach her desk she was confronted by Sarah, with the missing sleeves in her hand.

"I found them folded in your watered silk gown, my lady, in the deep drawer," said the girl as pertly as she might venture to speak. "I did not put them there."

A sudden conviction came over Laura that she had put them there herself one day when she was in a hurry, and she was generous enough to acknowledge it. She showed the maid where to place certain black ribbons that she wished to have attached to them, and again turned to her desk. As the girl retired, Mr. Carlton's step was heard upon the stairs. Laura thrust the torn paper

within her desk, and locked it again before he should come in, but he only went to the drawing-room.

A feeling, which Laura had never given herself the trouble to analyse, but which had no doubt its rise in pride, had prevented her ever speaking to her husband of her sister Clarice. Naturally proud and haughty, the characteristics of the Chesney family, she had not cared to confess to him, "I have a sister who is out in the world as a governess." When they—she and Mr. Carlton—should again be brought into contact with her family, as she supposed they should be sometime, and Mr. Carlton should find that there was another sister, whom he had not seen or heard of, it would be easy to say, "Oh, Clarice was from home during papa's residence at South Wennock." It would not be correct to assert that Lady Laura Carlton deliberately planned this little matter, touching upon the future; she did not, but the outline of it floated through her mind in an under-current. Thus she never spoke of her sister Clarice, and Mr. Carlton had not the faintest suspicion that she had ever possessed a sister of that name. Laura supposed that Clarice was back at home with them long before this, and when she looked in the "Morning Post," or other journal giving space to the announcement of what are called fashionable movements, a momentary surprise

would steal over her at not seeing Clarice's name. Only that very day, she had seen them mentioned as making part of the attendants at some great flower show: "The Earl of Oakburn and the Ladies Jane and Lucy Chesney," but there was no Lady Clarice. "Papa and Jane are punishing her for her governess escapade, and won't take her out this season," thought Laura. "Serve her right! it *was* a senseless trick of Clarice's ever to attempt such a thing."

Sarah, who, whatever her other shortcomings, was apt at the lady's-maid's duties imposed upon her by her mistress, soon brought back the dress with the sleeves and black ribbons arranged in it, and Laura hastened to attire herself. Very, very handsome did she look; her beautiful brown hair rested in soft waves on her head, her cheeks were flushed, her fair neck contrasted with the jet chain lying lightly upon it. Laura, vain Laura, all too-conscious of her own charms, lingered yet at the glass, and yet again; although perfectly aware that she was keeping the dinner waiting.

She tore herself away at last, a brighter flush of triumph on her cheeks, and ran down to the dining-room. Mr. Carlton was standing on the lower stairs near the surgery door, talking to some applicant, and Laura looked at them as she crossed the hall, and heard a few words that were then being spoken by

the man, who was no other than little Wilkes the barber.

“And so, sir, as Mr. John was unable to come, my wife would not have the other ; she felt afraid, and said she’d make bold to send for Mr. Carlton. If you’d excuse the being called in at a pinch, like, and attend, sir, we should be very grateful.”

“I’ll be round in half an hour,” was Mr. Carlton’s answer. “She is quite right ; it is *not* pleasant to be attended by one who has made so fatal a mistake ; one is apt to feel that there’s no security it may not be made again.”

And Laura knew that they were alluding to Stephen Grey.

CHAPTER V.

A FINE LADY.

IN the same handsome reception-room in Portland Place, where you saw them a fortnight ago, sat again the Earl of Oakburn and his daughter Jane. Jane was knitting some wrist-mittens for her father, her mind busy with many themes: as Jane's thoughtful mind was sure to be. She was beginning to doubt whether she should like the governess—who had entered on her new situation some ten days now: and she was deliberating how she should best introduce the subject which she was determined to speak of that morning—Clarice. A whole fortnight had Jane hesitated, but the hesitation must have an end.

The earl read the *Times*. He was glancing over a short speech of his own, therein reported; for he had risen to his legs the previous night and given the Lords a little of his mind in his own peculiar fashion. A question had arisen in regard to the liberties of seamen in government vessels, and the earl told the assemblage, and especially the Lord

Chancellor, that they were all wrong together, and knew no more about the matter than a set of ignorant landlubbers could be expected to know.

"Papa," said Jane, knitting rapidly at the mittens—the old sailor called them muffatees—"does it appear to you that Miss Lethwait will suit?"

"She'll suit for all I know," the earl replied. "Why shouldn't she suit?"

Jane was silent for a moment before making any answer. "I fear she is above her situation, papa: that we shall find her—if I may use the word—too pretentious."

"Above her situation?" repeated the earl. "How can she be above that?"

"Papa, I allude to her manner. I do not like it. Wishing to treat her with all courtesy as a gentlewoman, I made no arrangements for her sitting apart from us in the evening; but I must say I did not expect her to identify herself so completely with us as she is doing; at least in so short a time. When visitors are here, Miss Lethwait never seems to remember that she is not in all respects their equal; she comports herself entirely as if she were a daughter of the house, taking more upon herself a great deal than I think is seemly. She pushes herself before me, papa; she does indeed."

"Push her back," said Lord Oakburn.

"That is easier said than done, with regard to Miss Lethwait," replied Jane. "I grant that she is in manner naturally imperious, inclined to treat every one *de haut en bas*——"

"Treat every one how?" was the angry interruption. "Where's the sense of jabbering that foreign stuff, Jane; I thought you were above it."

"I beg your pardon, papa," Jane meekly answered, full of contrition for her fault, which had been spoken in thoughtlessness, for Lord Oakburn understood no language but that of his native land, and had little toleration for those who interlarded it with another. "It is evident that Miss Lethwait is by nature haughty, I was observing; haughty in manner; but I do consider that she forgets her position in this house in a way that is anything but agreeable. But that you are unobservant, papa, you would see that she does."

"Tell her of it," said Lord Oakburn, seizing his stick and giving a forcible rap.

"I should not much like to do that," returned Jane. "What annoys me is, that she does not feel herself what is becoming conduct, and what is not——"

"I don't see that there's anything unbecoming in her conduct," was the interruption. "She should not stop long with Lucy, I can tell you, if I saw anything of that."

"No, no, papa, there is nothing unbecoming in

one sense; I never meant to imply it. Miss Lethwait is always a lady. She is too much of a lady, if you can understand it; she assumes too much; she never seems to recollect, when in the drawing-room of an evening, that she is not one of ourselves, and a very prominent one. A stranger, coming in, might take her for the mistress of the house, certainly for an elder daughter. And when we are alone, papa, don't you note how familiar she is with you, conversing with you freely on all kinds of subjects, listening to you, and laughing at your stories of your sea life?"


"She has a splendid figure," remarked the earl, not altogether, as Jane thought, *apropos* to the point. "And she talks sensibly—for a woman."

"Well, papa, I don't like her."

"Then don't keep her. You are the best judge of whether she's fit for her berth, or whether she is not."

"As governess to Lucy she is entirely fit. I could not wish to find a more efficient instructress. Her mode of teaching, her training, her companionship, all appear to me to be admirable for a young girl."

"Let her stop on, then. Lucy's instruction is the chief point. As to a little pride or pretension, or whatever you may term it, it will do no harm. A wind inflating the sails ahead won't topple over the ship."



Jane said no more. Of course Lucy's instruction was of paramount importance, and Jane was not one to merge weighty matters in trifles. Lord Oakburn returned to his newspaper, and there ensued a pause. Presently he spoke abruptly.

"When do you intend to see after Clarice?"

Jane's heart gave a great bound, and she dropped a needle in her consternation. So entirely taken by surprise was she, that she could only look up in silence. At that very moment she was trying to frame an inoffensive way of putting the self-same question—and now he had spoken it! The flush of emotion illumined her face, tinging even her drooping eyelids.

"Papa! *may* I see after her? Will you allow it?"

"If you don't, I shall," said the earl.

"It is what I have been longing to do," returned Jane. "Every morning, for this long while past, I have been resolving to speak to you, papa; and every night, when the night came, I have reproached myself for not having had the courage to do so. May Clarice come home again?"

"Well, I don't know what you may deem shipshape, but in my opinion it is scarcely the thing for Lady Clarice Chesney to be flourishing abroad as a governess."

"It has been wrong all along; doubly wrong since the change in our position occurred. But, papa, I did mention her name to you at the time of Lord Oakburn's death," Jane deprecatingly added, as a reminder, "and you bade me be silent and let Clarice come to her senses."

"But she doesn't come to them, my Lady Jane," retorted the earl, giving a few exasperated raps with his stick to enforce his words,—a plaything which he had by no means forgotten the use of. "Here are the weeks and months creeping on, and she never gives token that she has come to them, or that she is coming to them. Obstinate little minx!"

"Papa, it is possible that she may not have heard of the change in our position. It is very unlikely, certainly, that she should not; but still it is just possible."

"Rubbish! it's not possible," cried the earl, in his own domineering manner. "It is her pride that stands in the way, Jane; she has been holding a tacit battle with us, you see, waiting for us to give way first."

"Yes, I have thought that must be it. Clarice was always self-willed, the same as—as——"

"The same as who?" thundered the earl, believing that Jane was impertinently alluding to himself.

"As Laura, I was going to say, papa. Forgetting that you had forbidden her name to be mentioned before you."

Jane had indeed forgotten it. The earl's brow grew hot with anger, and he rose to pace the room, giving Jane a little of his mind, and the floor of his stick, some of his words being more suitable to the quarter-deck of his old vessel in Portsmouth Harbour than to his London drawing-room.

"Don't you talk of Laura before me again, Jane. She has chosen her own home and abandoned mine; let her abide by it. But Clarice's sin was lighter, look you, and she shall be forgiven. I suppose you know where she is."

"No, I do not, papa."

Lord Oakburn stopped in his walk: the denial had evidently surprised him.

"Not know!" he repeated, gazing sternly at Jane. "I was given to understand that you *did* know. Clarice writes to you."

"I do not know exactly where she is," explained Jane. "It is somewhere in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park, I believe, and I have no doubt she will be easily found. When I write to her, I send my letters to a library there, by Clarice's directions, and I should think they can give me her address. Oh, papa, I have so longed to go there and ask for it!"

"You can go now," bluntly rejoined the earl.
"Shall you be an hour getting ready?"

"I shall not be five minutes," replied Jane, the glad tears standing in her eyes, as she laid her work aside. Lord Oakburn rang the bell, and a man came in.

"The carriage for Lady Jane."

But before the servant could retire, Jane interposed. "Stay an instant, Wilson. Papa, I think I had better not take the carriage. I would rather go on foot quietly."

"Then you won't go quietly," returned the earl.
"Do you hear, sir? What do you stand gaping there for? The carriage instantly for Lady Jane."

Wilson flew off as if he had been shot. The new servants had become accustomed to these explosions of the earl's; but, with all his hot temper, he was a generous master.

Jane, for once, did not give up her point without a battle. "Do consider it for an instant, papa; will it not be best that, under the circumstances, I should go quietly without the parade of servants and a carriage?"

"What do you mean by 'under the circumstances'?"

Jane unconsciously dropped her voice. "As Clarice has stooped to take upon herself the office

of a governess, I think she should come away from her place as such."

"No," said the earl, decisively. "She shall come away as Lady Clarice Chesney."

"There is one thing to be remembered," observed Jane, feeling that further opposition to the carriage would be useless. "She may not be able to come away with me. She may have to give warning first—a week's or a month's."

The suggestion angered the earl, and he lifted his stick menacingly.

"Not leave without warning! Let them dare to keep her. Tell the people who she is. Tell them who I am, and that I demand her."

"Dearest papa," Jane ventured to remonstrate, "courtesy is due and must be observed to Clarice's employers. She has contracted to perform certain duties in their house; and to abandon them at a moment's notice may be scarcely practicable. They may concede the point to me as a favour, but it will not do to demand it as a right."

"But I want her here," said the earl, who, now that he had broken the ice, was longing for Clarice's return with all the impatience of a child.

"And so do I want her," returned Jane; "and I will bring her away with me if I can. If not, the period of her return shall be fixed."

Jane quitted the room. She put on her things, a

white bonnet and black mantle, trimmed with crape, and then went to the study where sat Lucy and Miss Lethwait: the former wishing that the German language had never been invented for her especial torment; the latter showing up the faults in a certain exercise in the most uncompromising manner.

"O Jane! are you going out?" came the weary plaint. "You said I was to go with you to-day to the Botanical Gardens."

"Yes, later; I will not forget."

"Lucy says you wish the hour for her walking changed, Lady Jane," spoke up the governess.

"I think it would be more agreeable to you and to her," said Jane, "now that the weather has set in so hot. Lady Lucy is one who feels the heat much."

Jane was conscious that her tone was cold, that her words were haughty. *Lady Lucy!* She could not account for the feeling of reserve that was stealing over her in regard to Miss Lethwait, or why it should be so strong.

She went down to the carriage, which waited at the door, and was driven away. A grand carriage, resplendent in its coroneted panels, its hammer-cloth, and its servants with their wigs, their powder, their gold-headed canes. Jane quite shrank from the display, considering the errand upon which she was bent.

She had no difficulty whatever in finding the

library she was in search of, and was driven to it. But she had a difficulty in her way of another sort: *she knew not by what name to inquire for her sister.* Clarice had desired her to address her letters "Miss Chesney," but told her at the same time that it was not the name by which she was known. Jane went into the shop and the proprietor came forward.

"Can you tell me where a young lady resides of the name of Chesney?" she inquired. "She is a governess in a family."

"Chesney?—Chesney?" was the answer, spoken in consideration. "No, ma'am; I do not know any one of the name."

Jane paused. "Some letters have been occasionally addressed here for her; for Miss Chesney; and I believe she used to fetch them away herself."

"Oh, yes, that was Miss Beauchamp," was the answer, the speaker's face lighting up with awakened remembrance. "I beg your pardon, ma'am; I thought you said Miss Chesney. The letters were addressed to a Miss Chesney, and Miss Beauchamp used to come for them."

Beauchamp! The problem was solved at once, and Jane wondered at her own stupidity in not solving it before. What more natural than that Clarice should take her second name—Beauchamp? She was named Clarice Beauchamp Chesney. And Jane had strayed amid a whole directory of names

over and over again, without the most probable one ever occurring to her mind.

"Thank you, yes;" she said; "Miss Beauchamp. Can you direct me to her residence?"

"No, ma'am, I really cannot," was the reply. "Miss Beauchamp was governess in two families in succession, both of them residing in Gloucester Terrace, but I do not think she stayed long at either. She was at Mrs. Lorton's first, and at Mrs. West's afterwards."

Jane had not known that; Clarice had never told her of having changed her situation.

"I suppose we must both be speaking of the same person," she suddenly cried. "Perhaps you will describe her to me?"

"Willingly," answered the librarian. And the description was so accurate that Jane instantly recognised it for her sister's.

"Miss Beauchamp disappeared from the neighbourhood suddenly—as it seemed to me," he continued. "At any rate, she ceased coming here. We have two or three letters with the same address waiting still."

Jane wondered whether they could be those she had sent. She asked to see them, and he brought them forward: three. They were the same.

"I will take them away with me," said Jane.

The librarian hesitated at this—not unnaturally. “You will pardon me, I am sure, ma’am, if I inquire by what authority you would take them? Miss Beauchamp may call for them yet.”

Jane smiled. “They were written by me,” she said, tearing open one of the letters and showing him the signature. “And,” she added, taking out her card-case and handing him a card, “that will prove that I am Jane Chesney.”

The librarian bowed; and intimated that her ladyship was of course at liberty to do what she pleased with her own letters.

“Upon second thoughts, I will leave this one, the last written, and write upon it our present address,” said Jane. “As you observe, Miss Beauchamp may call yet.”

Obtaining the address of the two families in which she was told Miss Beauchamp had served, Lady Jane quitted the shop, and walked on to Gloucester Terrace, ordering the carriage to follow her by-and-by. She reached the house occupied by the Lortons first, and inquired of a showy footman whether Mrs. Lorton was at home. The answer was given in the affirmative, but with some hesitation: it was earlier than the orthodox hour for receiving visitors, and the man probably doubted whether his mistress was presentable. Jane was shown into an excessively smart room, and after some delay an excessively

smart lady came to her ; but neither room nor lady possessed aught of refinement.

Jane had not given her name. "It is of no consequence : I am a stranger," she said to the servant when he inquired. Mrs. Lorton dropped Jane a swimming curtsy, and sailing to a large velvet ottoman in the middle of the room, took her seat upon it. Jane looked, as she ever did, a lady, and Mrs. Lorton was all smiles and suavity.

"I have called to inquire if you can kindly give me any information as to the present address of a young lady who lived with you as governess," began Jane. "A Miss Beauchamp."

Mrs. Lorton's smiles froze at the question. "I know nothing about Miss Beauchamp," she answered, somewhat rudely. "She did not behave well in my house, and it was a good riddance when she quitted it."

"Not behave well !" echoed Jane.

"No, she did not. She encouraged my son to pay her attention, and when it was all found out she left me at a pinch without a governess. Perhaps you know her ?"

"I do," answered Jane, with cold dignity. She *knew* that Clarice was being traduced. "Miss Beauchamp is my sister."

"Oh !" said Mrs. Lorton ; and there was a whole volume of contempt in the tone. The lady before

her, who had caused her to dress herself in that inconvenient haste, was after all nothing but a governess's sister! Mrs. Lorton felt angry and vexed; and the expression that her face assumed did not add to its beauty.

"I would not have troubled you," resumed Lady Jane, "but I do not exactly know where my sister is now, and I am in search of her. I inquired at a library where I know Miss Beauchamp used to deal, and they gave me your address, as one of the situations in which Miss Beauchamp had lived. If you can direct me to her present place of abode, I shall return you sincere thanks."

"I tell you I know nothing of her," repeated Mrs. Lorton. "Here, Harriet," she added, as a young lady as much over-dressed as herself entered the room, "here's that Miss Beauchamp's sister come to inquire after her. The idea of our knowing anything about her!"

"The idea!" repeated the young lady pertly to Jane. "When she left us, she took a fresh place a few doors further on. But she didn't stop there long."

"She was not calculated for a governess," said Mrs. Lorton. "She carried her head too high."

"I scarcely think she was calculated for one," remarked Jane. "She was of good birth, and the consciousness of that may have caused her to—as

you express it—carry her head high. Though unduly high I do not think she was capable of carrying it. When she quitted her home to become a governess, she made a firm determination to do her duty in her new life and adapt herself to its penalties. Our family was in straitened circumstances at the time; and Clarice—and my sister generously resolved to get her own living, so that she might no longer be a burden upon it. Others, well born and connected, have done as much before her.”

Mrs. Lorton threw back her head. “That is sure to be the case,” she said, in a sneering tone of disbelief. “Half the young women on the governess’ list will assure you that they are of good birth, and only go out through family misfortunes—if they can get anybody to listen to them. What does the one say, that we have now, Harriet?”

Harriet, who was standing at the window, laughed—and there was the same sneering tone in its sound that was so disagreeable in the laugh of her vulgar mother.

“She says that her aunt—Oh, mamma! here are visitors,” broke off the young lady. “The most beautiful carriage has driven up to the door!”

Mrs. Lorton—forgetting her dignity—hastened to the window. Jane rose: it was not a pleasant atmosphere to remain in.

“You can then really not tell me anything as to

Miss Beauchamp's movements?" she asked again of Mrs. Lorton; for, somehow, a doubt was upon her whether the lady could not have said more had she chosen.

"Now you have had my answer," said Mrs. Lorton. "And I think it the height of impertinence in Miss Beauchamp to send people here to my house about any concerns of hers."

Jane dropped a stately curtsy; her only leave-taking; and was turning to the door when it was thrown open by the footman.

"The Lady Jane Chesney's carriage!"

Mrs. Lorton was in a flutter of expectation. Could any Lady Jane Chesney be vouchsafing a call on *her*? Where was the Lady Jane? Was she coming up? The man was showing her unwelcome visitor down-stairs; but his mistress called to him so sharply that Jane had to make her way out of the house alone.

"Has any visitor come in?"

"No, ma'am."

"No!" repeated Mrs. Lorton. "What did you mean then? Whose carriage is that? You came and announced Lady somebody."

"I announced the carriage, ma'am, for the lady who was here," returned the man, wondering at the misapprehension. "The footman said he had called for his lady, Lady Jane Chesney."

Mrs. Lorton gave a great gasp. *She* Lady Jane Chesney! She flew to the window just in time to catch a glimpse of Jane's black skirts as she took her seat in the carriage. She saw the earl's coronet on it; she saw the servant step nimbly up behind and lay his gold cane slant-wise. Mrs. Lorton had made a horrible mistake!

"Oh, Harriet! what can we do?" she exclaimed, in a faint voice.

"Mamma, I thought, I did indeed, that she looked like a lady! Lady Jane Chesney! What will she think of us?"

Mrs. Lorton was unable to say what, and sat down in an agony. Her life, of late years, had been spent in striving to get into "society." And she had for once had a real live earl's daughter in her drawing-room, and had insulted her!

"How could poor Clarice have stayed in that family for a day?" thought Jane.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OMINOUS SHADOW.

LADY JANE was next driven to the other address, Mrs. West's. The lady was at home, and Jane found her a very different person from Mrs. Lorton: a kind, cordial, chatty little woman, without pretence or form; a lady too. Mr. West was engaged in some City business, and neither he nor his wife aspired to be greater and grander than they were entitled to be.

"Miss Beauchamp came to us from the Lortons," she said, when Jane had explained her business. "We liked her very much, and were sorry to lose her, but——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Jane. "Can you tell me why Miss Beauchamp left her situation at the Lortons?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. West, with a merry laugh. "She had scarcely entered their house when that vulgar son of theirs—and indeed I am not in the habit of backbiting, but he is vulgar—began to push his admiration upon her. She bore with it for some

time, repelling him as she best could ; but it grew unbearable, and Miss Beauchamp felt compelled to appeal to Mrs. Lorton. Mrs. Lorton did not behave well in it. She took her son's part, and wished to lay the blame on Miss Beauchamp ; Miss Beauchamp was naturally indignant at this, and insisted on quitting the house on the self-same day. Mrs. Lorton then came round, tried to soothe Miss Beauchamp, and offered her an increase of salary if she would remain."

"But she did not?"

"Certainly not. Miss Beauchamp came to me, telling me what had occurred, and I was only too glad to engage her at once as governess to my children. We had a little acquaintance with the Lortons, and I had seen Miss Beauchamp several times, and liked her. She came into this house straight from the Lortons when she quitted them, and very pleased we were to secure her."

A different account, this, from the one given by Mrs. Lorton ; but Jane had felt certain the other was not strictly in accordance with truth.

"How long did Miss Beauchamp remain with you?" she inquired.

"But a short time. She had been with us about six months, when she told me she must give warning to leave. I was so surprised ; so sorry."

"Why did she give warning? From what cause?"

"She did not say what, and I could not draw it from her. Miss Beauchamp was invariably reserved as to her private affairs, her family and all that; though open as the day in regard to general matters. All she said was, that she *wished* to leave; and when I pressed her to state frankly whether there was anything in my house that she disliked or wished altered, she answered that she was perfectly happy in it: and, but for compelling circumstances (I remember the expression still; 'compelling circumstances'), should not have thought of leaving it."

"And did she quit it instantly; that day; as she had Mrs. Lorton's?"

"No, no," said Mrs. West. "It was a month's warning that she gave me, and she remained until its close. Then she left us."

"Where did she go then?"

"We never knew. There appeared, as it seemed to us, some little mystery connected with it;—though in truth that may have been but fancy on our part. Many a governess when quitting her situation does not deem it necessary to proclaim her future movements to those she leaves behind her."

"In what way did there seem to be a mystery connected with it?" asked Jane.

"Well, I can hardly describe it to you," was the

frank reply. "We fancied it chiefly, I believe, from Miss Beauchamp's entire silence as to her future proceedings. I told her I should be happy to be referred to; but she replied that she had no intention of taking another situation, and therefore should not require a reference."

"What was she going to do, then?" asked Jane, in amazement.

"I am unable to say. I remember we wondered much at the time. She had never spoken of her family, and we picked up the notion, though it may not have been a correct one, that she was without relatives. An impression arose amongst us that she was going to be married."

"To be married?" echoed Jane, her pulses quickening.

"We had no real cause to think it," continued Mrs. West. "I put the question to her, I remember, whether she was about to take up her abode with relatives, and she laughed and said, No, she was going to embark in a new way of life altogether."

"It is very strange!" exclaimed Lady Jane. "Do you not know where she went when she quitted your house?—where she drove to, for instance? Whether she went into the next street?—whether she went into the country?—in short, what her immediate movements were?"

"I would tell you in a moment if I knew; but I never have known," replied Mrs. West. "She went away in a cab with her luggage, not stating where. We thought it strange that she should preserve to us this reticence: we had been so very intimate together. We all liked Miss Beauchamp very much indeed, and had treated her entirely as a friend."

"Did she seem to be in good spirits when she left you?"

"Quite so; she was as gay as possible, and said she should come back and see us some time. You seem very anxious," added Mrs. West, noting her visitor's perplexed brow.

"I am indeed anxious," was the answer. "How long do you say this was ago?"

"It was last June. Twelve months ago exactly."

"And you have never since seen her, or heard from her?"

"Never at all. We have often wondered what has become of her."

"I must find her," exclaimed Jane, in some excitement. "As to her having married, that is most improbable; she would not be likely to enter on so grave a step without the knowledge of her family. At least, I—I—should think she would not," added Jane, as a remembrance of Laura's disobedient marriage arose to her mind, rendering her less

confident. "I may as well tell you who Miss Beauchamp is," she resumed; "there is no reason why I should not. My father, a gentleman born and highly connected, was very poor. There were four daughters of us at home, and Clarice, the third—"

"Then—I beg your pardon—you are Miss Beauchamp's sister?" interrupted Mrs. West, quickly.

"Yes. Clarice took a sudden determination to go out as governess. She had been highly educated, and so far was well qualified; but her family were entirely against it. Clarice persisted; she had but one motive to this, the lessening expenses at home: a good one, of course, but my father could not be brought to see it. He said she would disgrace her family name; that he would not have a daughter of his out in the world—a Chesney working for her bread; Clarice replied that no disgrace should accrue to the name through her, and she, in spite of all our opposition, quitted home. She went, I find, to the Lortons first, calling herself Miss Beauchamp; she had been christened Clarice Beauchamp; Clarice, after her great-aunt, the Countess of Oakburn; Beauchamp after her godfather."

"Then she is not Miss Beauchamp?"

"She is Lady Clarice Chesney."

Mrs. West felt excessively surprised. Like her neighbour Mrs. Lorton, she had not been brought

into familiar personal contact with an earl's daughter—except in waxwork.

“I have the honour then of speaking to—to——”

“Lady Jane Chesney,” quietly replied Jane. “But when Clarice was with you she was only Miss Chesney; it is but recently that my father has come into the title. You will readily imagine that we are most anxious now to have her home, and regret more than before that she ever left it.”

“But—am I to understand that you do not know where she is?—that she has not been home since she left us last June?” exclaimed Mrs. West in bewilderment.

“We do not know where she is. We do not know now where to look for her.”

“I never heard of such a thing.”

“Until to-day, I took it for granted that she was still in a situation in this neighbourhood,” explained Jane. “My father's displeasure prevented my seeing personally after Clarice; in fact, he forbade my doing so. When I came out from home to-day I fully expected to take her back with me: or, if that could not be, to fix the time for her return. I never supposed but I should at once find her; and I cannot express to you what I felt when the proprietor of the library, where I used to address my letters to Clarice, told me Miss Beauchamp had left the neighbourhood;—what I feel still. It is not

disappointment; it is a great deal worse. I begin to fear I know not what."

"I'm sure I wish I could help you to find her!" heartily exclaimed Mrs. West. "Where *can* she be? She surely cannot know the change in her position!"

"I should imagine not," replied Jane. "Unless—but no, I will not think that," she broke off, wiping from her forehead the dew which the sudden and unwelcome thought had suddenly sent there. "Unless Clarice should have married very much beneath herself, and fears to let it be known to us," was what she had been about to say.

"It has occurred to us sometimes that Miss Beauchamp might have taken a situation abroad; or with a family who afterwards took her abroad," said Mrs. West. "What you say now, Lady Jane, renders it more than ever probable."

Jane considered. It was certainly the most probable solution of the puzzle. "Yes," she said aloud, "I think you must be right. It is more than likely that she is abroad in some remote continental city. Thank you for your courtesy in giving me this information," she added, as she rose and laid a card on the table with her address upon it. "Should you at any time obtain further news, however slight, you will, I am sure, be kind enough to forward it to me."

Mrs. West gave a promise, and Jane went out to her carriage with a heavy heart. It was a most unsatisfactory story to carry back to Lord Oakburn.

Another carriage, with its hammer-cloth and its coronets and its attendant servants, and above all, its coat of arms, that of the Oakburn family, was at the door in Portland Place when Jane's drew up. It was Lady Oakburn's. Jane went into the hall; and sounds, as of voices in dispute, came from the room where she had left her father in the morning. The earl and his old dowager aunt were enjoying one of their frequent differences of opinion.

Lucy came running down the stairs. "Have you come back to take me out, Jane?"

Jane stooped to kiss her. "My dear, you know that I never willingly break a promise," she said, "but I almost fear that I must break mine to you to-day. I am not sure that I can go to the botanical fête. I have heard bad news, Lucy; and I shall have to tell it to papa in the best way that I can. But, if I don't take you to-day, I will take you some other day."

"What is the bad news?" asked the child, with all a child's open curiosity.

"I cannot tell it you now, Lucy. You go back to Miss Lethwait. How long has Aunt Oakburn been here?"

"Ever so long," was Lucy's lucid answer. "She is quarrelling with papa about Clarice."

"About Clarice!" involuntarily repeated Jane. "What about Clarice?"

"I was in the room with papa and Miss Lethwait when Aunt Oakburn came——"

"What took you and Miss Lethwait to it?" interrupted Jane.

"We went in to get those drawings; we did not know papa was there; and he kept us talking, and then Lady Oakburn came in. Jane, she looked so angry with papa, and she never said Good morning to him, or How do you do, or anything, but she asked him whether he was not ashamed of himself to let Clarice be abroad still as a governess; and then they began to quarrel, and Miss Lethwait brought me away."

"How strange that they should be all suddenly wanting to bring home Clarice when we cannot find her!" thought Jane.

She motioned Lucy up-stairs to the study, and entered the drawing-room. Lord Oakburn stood in the middle of the floor, his tongue and his stick keeping up a duet; and the dowager—her black bonnet all awry, her shawl thrown on a neighbouring chair, and her cheeks in a flame—was talking quite as angrily and more loudly than the earl. They had strayed, however, from the first matter in

dispute—Clarice ; had entered, in fact, upon at least a dozen others ; just now the point of debate was the letting of Chesney Oaks, which had been finally taken by Sir James Marden.

Jane's entrance put an end to the fray. The earl dropped his voice, and Lady Oakburn pulled her bonnet straight upon her head. These personal encounters were in truth so frequent between the two, that neither retained much animosity afterwards, or indeed much recollection of what the particular grievance had been, or the hard compliments they had mutually paid.

"Well, and where is she?" began the earl to Jane.

Jane knew only too well to whom he alluded. The presence of the dowager made her task all the more difficult ; but she might not dare to temporise with her father, or hide the fact that Clarice could not be found. She did not, however, reply instantly, and the earl spoke again.

"Have you brought her back with you?"

"No, papa. I——"

"Then I'll have the law of the people!" thundered the earl, working his stick ominously. "Here's your aunt come down now with her orders about Clarice,"—with a fierce flourish towards the angry old lady. "As if I did not know how to conduct my own affairs as well as any interference can tell me!"

"No, you don't, Oakburn. You don't!"

"And as if I should not conduct them as I please without reference to interference," continued the earl aggravatingly. "She's my daughter, madam; she's not yours."

"Then why didn't you prevent her going out at all? Why didn't you drag her back with cords?" retorted the dowager, nodding her bonnet at her adversary. "I would; and I have told you so ten times. What does Clarice say for herself?" she added, turning sharply upon Jane. "Why didn't she come home of her own accord, without waiting to be sent for? She has got the Chesney temper, and that's an obstinate one. That's what it is."

"Aunt," said Jane, faintly,—*"papa,"* she said, scarcely knowing which of them to address, or how to frame her news, "I am sorry to say that I cannot find Clarice. She—I——"


They both interrupted her in a breath, turning their anger upon Jane. What did she mean by "not finding" Clarice, when she had said all along that she knew where she was?

Poor Jane had to explain. That she *had* thought she knew where Clarice was; but that Clarice was gone: she had been gone ever since last June. Bit by bit the whole tale was extracted from Jane; the mystery of Clarice's leaving Mrs. West's so sud-

denly (and it really did look something of a mystery), and her never having been heard of since.

To describe the earl's dismay would be a difficult task. When he fully comprehended that Clarice was lost—lost, for all that could be seen at present—his temper gave way prodigiously. He stormed, he thumped, he talked, he abused the scape-goat Pompey, who had had nothing in the world to do with it, but who happened unluckily to come into the room with an announcement that luncheon was ready; he abused Lady Oakburn, he abused Jane. For once in her life the dowager let him go on to his heart's content without retorting in kind: she had in truth her grand-niece's welfare at heart, and the news Jane had brought terrified her. Lunch! No; they were in too much perplexity, too much real care, to sit down to a luncheon table.

"I have contained myself as long as I could," cried the dowager, flinging back the strings of her bonnet, and darting reproachful looks at Lord Oakburn. "Every week since you came to London have I said to myself on the Monday morning, He'll have her back this week; but that week has gone on like the others, and he has not had her back—you, Oakburn!—and I said to myself, as I sat down to my breakfast this day, I'll go and ask him what he thinks of himself. And I'm come. Now then, Oakburn!"




Poor Jane, utterly powerless to stem the raging spirits of the two, remembered that Lady Oakburn had been as ready as the earl to leave Clarice to herself: to say that she ought to be left to herself, unsought, until she should "come to her senses."

"I want Clarice," continued the dowager, while the earl marched to and fro in the room, brandishing his stick. "I'm going away next month to Switzerland, and I'll take her with me, if she behaves herself and shows proper contrition for what she has done. As to your not finding her, Jane, that must be nonsense: you always were good for nothing, you know."

"Dear aunt, the case is this," said Jane, in a sadly subdued tone. "Perhaps you do not quite understand it all. I should not think so much of Clarice's not having been, or sent, to Mrs. West's since she left them; but what I do think strange is, that she should not have called or sent as usual for my letters. All the letters I have written to her since Christmas, three, were lying at the library still. I have brought two of them away with me, leaving the other, in case she should call yet."

"What has made her leave the letters there?" cried the dowager.

"It is that which I cannot understand. It is that which—I don't know why—seems to have struck my heart with fear."



Lady Oakburn interrupted in an impatient tone. "I don't understand it at all, Jane. Perhaps you'll begin at the beginning and enlighten me."

"What beginning?" asked Jane, uncertain how to take the words.

"What beginning!" echoed the exasperated old lady. "Why, the beginning of it all, when Clarice first went out. I know nothing about the particulars; never did know. What letters did you send to her, and what answers did you get?—and where did she hide herself, and what did she tell you of it? Begin at the beginning, I say."

"It will be two years next month, July, since Clarice left us," began Jane, with her customary obedience. "Sometime in the following month, August, I received the first letter from her, telling me she had found a situation in the neighbourhood of Hyde Park, and that she would"—Jane hesitated a moment, but went on—"keep her vow."

"Her vow! What vow?"

"She took a vow before leaving home, that she would never betray our name as connected with her.

"Oh!" said the countess. "She took it in a passion, I suppose."

"Yes. She said she hoped the situation would prove a comfortable one, and that if I liked to write to her, I might address my letters 'Miss Chesney,'

to be kept at a certain library in the neighbourhood, where she would call for them; but she again repeated that she was not known by her own name. I did write to her, three or four letters in the course of the next twelvemonth; and she answered them. She never told me she was not in the same situation, and I concluded she was there. Summer weather had come round then——”

“Get on with your story, Jane. What has summer weather got to do with it?” was the old lady’s angry reprimand. And Lord Oakburn had stopped his restless walk to listen.

“In that summer—I think it was in June—I had another letter from Clarice, telling me not to write until I heard from her again, as she might be going to the seaside. Of course I supposed that the family were going to take her. This, you observe, was the month when, as Mrs. West says, she quitted them. I heard nothing more until the next January, when she wrote to wish us the *bonne année*, a custom she had learnt in France; and that letter was forwarded to South Wennock from our old home at Plymouth. I——”

“Stop a bit,” said the dowager. “What did she say of herself and her movements in that letter?”

“Really nothing. She did not say a word about the seaside journey, or that she was back in London, or anything about it. She tacitly suffered me to

infer—as I did infer—that she was still with the same family. The letter bore the London postmark. She said she was well and happy, and asked after us all; and there was a short postscript to the letter, the words of which I well remember,—‘I have maintained my vow.’ I showed this letter to papa, and he——”

“Forbade you to answer it,” interrupted the earl, for Jane had stopped in hesitation. And the old countess nodded her approval—as if *she* should have forbidden it also.

“So that letter was not answered,” resumed Jane. “But in the next March, I—I—a circumstance occurred to cause me to feel anxious about Clarice, and I wrote to her. In fact, I had a dream, which very much——”

“Had a what?” shrieked the countess.

“I know how foolish you must think me, aunt. But it was a dreadful dream; a significant, strange, fearful dream. It seemed to bode ill to Clarice, to shadow forth her death. I *am* superstitious with regard to dreams; I cannot help being so; and it made a great impression on me. I wrote then to Clarice, asking for news of her. I told her we had left Plymouth, and gave her the address at South Wrenock. No reply came, and I wrote again. I wrote a third time, and still there was no answer. But I did not think much of that. I only thought

that Clarice was angry at my not having answered her New Year's letter, and would not write, to punish me. To-day, upon going to the library, I found those three letters waiting there still: not one of them had been fetched away by Clarice."

"And the people she was with say Clarice left them last June!—and they don't know what place she went to, or where she is?" reiterated the earl, while the old dowager only stared in discomposure.

"They know nothing of her whatever, papa, or of her movements since."

"Why, that's a twelvemonth ago!"

Yes, it was a twelvemonth ago. They, the three, stood looking at each other in silence; and a nameless fear, like a shadow of evil, crept in midst them, as the echo of the words died away on the air.

CHAPTER VII.

A TEMPTING BAIT.

THERE was a crash of carriages at one of the houses in Portland Place; and as the doors were flung open ever and again to the visitors, the glare of many lights, the strains of music, the sweet perfume from the array of hot-house flowers on the staircase, struck dazzlingly to the charmed senses of the beautiful forms, gay as butterflies, fluttering in. The Earl of Oakburn and Lady Jane Chesney were holding an evening reception.

Their first that season, and their last. And yet, scarcely to be called "that season;" for the season was well-nigh over. In an ordinary year it would have been quite over, for August had come in, and numbers were already on the wing to cooler places, panting from the heat and dust of the close metropolis; but Parliament had sat late, and many lingered still.

Jane had urged on the earl the necessity (she had put it so) of their giving one of these receptions. She had accepted invitations to a few; the earl to

a very few; and she thought they should make a return. But such a thing was very much out of Lord Oakburn's line—for the matter of that, it was not in Jane's—and he had held out against it. Quite at the last moment, when three parts of the world had quitted London, the earl surprised Jane one morning by telling her she might "send out and invite the folks," and then it would be done with.

They were somewhat more at ease with regard to Clarice. Somewhat. Every possible inquiry that the earl could think of had been set on foot to find her, and the aid of the police called in. Day after day, hour after hour, had the old Countess of Oakburn come down to Portland Place, asking if she was found, and worrying the earl well-nigh out of his senses. She threw all the blame upon him; she told him any father but he would have confined her as a lunatic, rather than have suffered her to be out without knowing where; and Jane was grievously reproached for her share, in assuming that Clarice was in the situation in the vicinity of Hyde Park, when it turned out that she had been some twelve months gone away from it.

But still they were more at ease—or tried to feel so. In the course of their researches, which had extended to every likely quarter, they learnt the fact that one of the governess-agencies had procured

a situation some ten months previously for a Miss Beauchamp. She had gone out to be governess in an English family of the name of Vaughan, who had settled in Lower Canada. The lady was described as young, nice-looking, and of pleasing manners; and she had told the agent that she had no relatives in England to consult as to her movements: altogether there did seem a probability of its being really Clarice. The Earl of Oakburn, in his impetuous fashion, assumed it to be so without further doubt, and Jane hoped it.

Then there was a lull in the storm of suspense. Miss Beauchamp—the supposed Clarice—was written to; not only by Jane, but by those who were making official inquiries on Lord Oakburn's part; they were tolerably at their ease until answers should arrive, and were at liberty to think of other things. It was during this lull of ease that Lord Oakburn told Jane she might hold her reception.

And this was the night: and the rooms, considering how late was the month, August, were well filled, and Jane was doing her best, in her ever quiet way, to entertain her guests, wishing heartily, at the same time, that the thing was over.

In a pretty dress of white crape, a wreath of white flowers confining her flowing curls, sufficient mourning for a child, stood Lucy Chesney, her eyes beaming, her damask cheeks glowing with excite-

ment. Perhaps Jane was not wise in suffering Lucy to appear: some of the people now around would have reproached her that it was not "the thing," had they dared; but Jane, who knew little of fashionable customs, had never once thought of excluding her. One of the rooms had been appropriated to dancing, and Lucy, a remarkably graceful and pretty girl, had found partners hitherto, in spite of her youth. Not a single dance had she missed; and now, after a waltz that had whirled her giddy, she leaned against the wall to regain breath.

"Just look at that child! How can they let her dance like that?"

The words reached Jane's ears, and she turned round to see what child could be meant. Lucy! But she might have divined it, for there was no other child present. Jane went up to her.

"You are dancing too much, Lucy. I wonder Miss Lethwait is not looking after you. Where is she?"

"Oh, thank you, Jane, but I don't want looking after," was the reply, the child's whole face sparkling with pleasure. "I never was so happy in my life."

"But you may dance too much. Where is Miss Lethwait?"

"Oh, I have not seen her for this long while. I think she is with papa in his smoking-room."

"With papa in his smoking-room!" echoed Jane.

"Well, I saw her there once: we have had three dances since that. She was filling papa's pipe for him!"

"Lucy!"

"It is true, Jane. Papa was cross; saying that it was a shame that he could not smoke his pipe because the house was full, and Miss Lethwait said, 'You shall smoke it, dear Lord Oakburn, and I'll keep the door;' and she took off her gloves and began to fill it. I came away then."

Jane's brow darkened. "Had you gone into the room with Miss Lethwait?"

"No; I was running about from one room to another, and I ran in there and saw them talking. Jane! Jane! please don't keep me! They are going to begin another dance, and I am engaged for it."

The room called Lord Oakburn's smoking-room was a small den at the end of a passage. Not of much account as to size or anything else, but Jane had deemed it might be found useful for the night, and it had been converted into a reception-room. In it stood the governess, Miss Lethwait. She looked magnificent. Of that remarkably pale complexion which lights up so well, her eyes sparkling, her beautiful hair shining with a gloss purple as the

raven's wing, the plainness of her features—and they were plain—was this night eclipsed. She wore a low white evening dress trimmed with scarlet, showing to the best advantage her white neck, her falling shoulders, her rounded arms. Never had she appeared to so great advantage: take her as a whole, there was not one form in the room could vie with hers: she looked made to adorn a coronet—and perhaps she was thinking so.

Perhaps some one else was thinking so. One who could think, so far as that opinion went, to more purpose than Miss Lethwait could—the Earl of Oakburn. The rough old tar stood near her, and his eyes ranged over her with much admiration. He had not lost his liking for a fine woman, although he was verging on his sixtieth year. The smoking interlude was over. Lord Oakburn had enjoyed his pipe, and Miss Lethwait had obligingly kept the door against intruders.

Was Miss Lethwait laying herself out to entrap the unwary? Had she been doing it all along, ever since her entrance into that house? It was a question that she never afterwards could come to any satisfactory conclusion upon. Certainly the tempting bait had been ever before her mind's eye, constantly floating in her brain; but she was of sufficiently honourable nature, and to lay herself deliberately out to allure Lord Oakburn was what

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she had believed herself hitherto to be wholly incapable of doing. Had she seen another guilty of such conduct, her worst scorn would have been cast on the offender. And yet—was she not, on this night, working on for it? It is true she did not lure him on by word or look; but she did stand there knowing that the peer's admiring eyes were bent upon her. She *remained* in that room with him, conscious that she had no business in it; feeling that it was not honourable to Lady Jane to be there, who naturally supposed her to be mixing with the company and giving an eye to Lucy; she had taken upon herself to indulge him in his longing for his pipe; had filled it for him; had stayed in the fumes of the smoke while he finished it. In after life Miss Lethwait never quite reconciled that night with her conscience.

"Do you admire all this hubbub and whirl?" suddenly asked the earl.

"No, Lord Oakburn. It dazzles my sight and takes my breath away. But then I am unused to it."

"By Jove! I'd sooner be in a hurricane, rounding the North Pole. I told Jane it would take us out of our soundings to have this crowd here, but she kept bothering about the 'claims of society.' I'm sure society may be smothered for all the claim it has upon me!"

"The best society is that of our own fireside—those of us who have firesides to enjoy," returned Miss Lethwait.

"We have all got as much as that, I suppose," said the earl.

"Ah, no, Lord Oakburn! Not all. It is not my fortune to have one; and perhaps never will be. But I must not be envious of those who have."

She stood right under the gas chandelier, underneath its glittering drops; her head was raised to its own lofty height, but the eyelids drooped until the dark lashes rested on the cheeks—lashes that were moist with tears. She held a sprig of geranium in her white gloves, and her fingers were busy, slowly pulling it to pieces, leaf by leaf, petal from petal.

"And why should you not have a fireside?" bluntly asked Lord Oakburn, his sight not losing a single tear, a single movement of the fingers. Keen sight it was, peering from beneath its bushy brows.

She quite laughed in answer; a scornful laugh it was, telling of inward pain.

"You may as well ask, my lord, why one woman is Queen of England, and another the unhappy wretch who sits stitching her fifteen hours daily in a garret, wearing out her heart and her life. Our destinies are unequally marked out in this world, and we must take them as they are sent. Some-

times a feeling comes over me—I don't know whether it be a wrong one—that the harder the lot in this world, the brighter it will be in that which has to come."

"Favours and fortune are dealt out unequally, that's true enough," said the earl, thinking of his past life of poverty and struggle.

"They are, they are," she answered bitterly. "And the worst is, you are so chained down to your lot that you cannot escape from it. As a poor bird entrapped into a cage beats its wings against the wires unceasingly, seeking to free itself from its prison, and seeks in vain, so do we wear out our minds with our never-ending struggle to free ourselves from the thralldom that is forced by destiny upon us. I was not made to live out my life in dependence, in servitude: every hour of the day I feel that I was not. I feel that my mind, my heart, my intellect, were formed for a higher destiny: nevertheless it is the lot that is appointed me, and I must abide by it."

"Will you share my lot?" suddenly asked the earl.

The governess raised her eyes to his, a keen, searching glance darting from them, as if she suspected the words were but a jesting mockery. The peer moved nearer, and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"I am a blue jacket of nine-and-fifty years, Miss Lethwait, but I have got some wear in me yet. I never had an earthly ailment the matter with me except the gout; and if you'll be Countess of Oakburn and make my fireside yours, I'll take care of you."

It was rather an odd fashion of making an offer, certainly; gout and marriage jumbled incongruously together. The earl, however, was not a courtier: he could only speak the genuine thoughts of his heart.

"What do you say?" he continued, having given her scarcely time to speak.

She gently removed his hand from her shoulder, and lifted her wet eyes to his. The tears were genuine as the earl's words: emotion—perhaps gratitude—had called them up.

"Thank you greatly, Lord Oakburn, but it could not be."

"Why not?" asked the earl.

"It—I—it would not be agreeable to your daughters, my lord. They would never tolerate me as your wife."

"What are you talking about now?" cried the offended earl, who never brooked opposition, no matter from whom. "My daughters! What have they got to do with it? I am not their husband: they'll be getting husbands of their own."

"I am young; younger than Lady Jane," she said, her lips growing pale with the conflict that was before her. "Lord Oakburn, if you made me your wife it might sow dissension between you and all your daughters, especially between you and Lady Jane. I feel, I feel that it would do so."

"By Jupiter! but my girls shall not thwart me!" cried the peer in a heat. "I'd like to see them try at it. Laura has chosen for herself, Clarice has gone roaming nobody knows where, Lucy is a child; and as for Jane, do you think she possesses no common sense?"

The governess made no reply. She seemed to be endeavouring to steady her trembling lips.


"Look you, Miss Lethwait. The very day I came into the title, I made up my mind to marry: it is incumbent on me to do so. The next heir is a remote fellow, hardly a cousin at all, and he has lived in Nova Scotia or some such outlandish place since he was a boy. A pretty thing it would be to have that figure-head to succeed me! Anybody with a grain of gumption in his topsails would have known that I should marry; and, my dear, you've got a splendid figure, and I needn't look further; and I like you, and that's enough. Will you be Lady Oakburn?"

Miss Lethwait shook excessively; all of emotion that she possessed within her was called up. She

had really good and amiable qualities, and she did *not* like to be the means of sowing ill-feeling between the earl and his children. In that same moment the past grew clear to her, and she was conscious that the possibility of becoming Countess of Oakburn had been suspended before her dazzled vision as the one tempting bait of life. How few, how few have the strength to resist such baits! Do you remember the lines of *Praed*—where the Abbot of Glastonbury, walking out in the summer's noon, overtakes the "Red Fisherman" plying his trade, and halts to watch him?

There was turning of keys and creaking of locks
As he drew forth a bait from his iron box.
It was a bundle of beautiful things;
A peacock's tail and a butterfly's wings,
A scarlet slipper, an auburn curl,
An armlet of silk, and a bracelet of pearl;
And a packet of letters from whose sweet fold
Such a stream of delicate odours rolled,
That the abbot fell on his face, and fainted,
And deemed his spirit was half-way sainted.

For beautiful trifles such as these, woman has before now given up her soul: how much more, then, her hand and heart! Not one but bore charms for the eyes of Miss Lethwait; symbols, all of them—the scarlet slipper, the curl, the silk armlet, the bracelet—of that path of pleasure that must beset the future partner of Lord Oakburn's coronet. These things in prospective wear so plausible a magic! The packet of letters, sickly with



their excess of perfume, would hold out to Miss Lethwait the least attraction; love-letters penned by the old peer could savour of little save the ridiculous.

Would the tempting bait win her? Hear what success followed that, thrown by the "Red Fisherman."

One jerk, and there a lady lay,
A lady wondrous fair :
But the rose of her lip had all faded away,
And her cheek it was white and cold as clay,
And torn was her raven hair.
"Ha ! ha !" said the fisher in merry guise,
"Her gallant was hooked before !"
And the abbot heaved some piteous sighs,
For oft had he blessed those deep-blue eyes ;
The eyes of Mistress Shore.


The loving and the lovely, the pure and the sullied, the guilty and the innocent, all have succumbed to the golden visions held out to them : had Miss Lethwait withstood, she had been more than woman. Lord Oakburn waited for her answer patiently—patiently for him.

"If you wish to make me yours, my lord, so be it," she said, and her very lips quivered as she yielded to the temptation. "I will strive to be to you a good and faithful wife."

"Then that's settled," said the matter-of-fact earl, with more straightforwardness than gallantry. But he laid his hand upon her shoulder again, and bent to take a kiss from her lips.

At that moment one stood in the doorway, her haughty eyelids raised in astonishment, her blood bubbling up in fiery indignation. It was Lady Jane Chesney. She had come in search of the governess in consequence of the communication made by Lucy. That any serious intention accompanied that kiss, Jane suspected not. Never for a moment had it glanced across the mind of Jane that her father would marry again. In her devotion, her all-absorbing love, there had existed not a crevice for any such idea to insinuate itself. She gazed; but she only believed him to have been betrayed into a ridiculous bit of folly, not excusable even in a young man, considering Miss Lethwait's position in the family; worse than inexcusable in Lord Oakburn. And the governess, lingering in the room with him, standing passively to receive the kiss! No pen could express the amount of scornful condemnation cast on her from that moment by Jane Chesney.

Too pure-minded, too lofty-natured, too much the gentlewoman to surprise them, Jane drew back noiselessly, but some movement in the velvet curtain had attracted the notice of the earl. The door to this room was nothing but a sliding panel—and which Miss Lethwait had unslided (if there be such a word) when the pipe was finished—with looped-back inner curtains of crimson.



The curtain stirred, and Lord Oakburn, probably thinking he had been hidden long enough away from his guests, and that it might be as well to show himself again if he wished to observe a decent hospitality, went forth. Jane waited an instant, and entered. The governess was sitting then, her hands clasped before her, as one who is in deep thought or pain, her eyes strained on vacancy, and a burning spot of scarlet on her cheeks, scarlet as the geranium wreath in her black hair.

"Are you *here*, Miss Lethwait? I have been searching for you everywhere. Allow me to request that you pay proper attention to Lady Lucy."

She spoke in a ringing tone of command, one never yet heard by the governess from the quiet Jane Chesney. Miss Lethwait bowed her head as she quitted the room in obedience to see after Lucy, and the scarlet of emotion was turning to pallor on her cheeks.

Jane watched her out. She was not one to make a scene, but she had to compress her lips together, lest they should open in defiance of her will. Her mind was outraged by what she had witnessed; the very house was outraged; and she determined that on the morrow Miss Lethwait should quit. In her fond prejudice she cast little blame on her father; it all went to the share of the unlucky governess. Jane believed—and it cannot be denied that circum-

stances appeared to justify the belief—that Miss Lethwait had sought Lord Oakburn in that room, and hidden herself there with him, on purpose to play off upon him her wiles and fascinations.

“Never more shall she have the opportunity,” murmured Jane, “never more, never more. Ere midday to-morrow the house shall be rid of her.”

Jane mixed again with the crowd, but so completely vexed was she by what had occurred that she remained silent and passive, not paying the smallest fraction of attention to her guests. As she stood near one of the windows of the drawing-room, certain words, spoken in her vicinity, at length forced themselves on her notice: words that awoke her with a start to the reality of the present.

“Her name’s Beauchamp. My mother wrote to one of the governess-agencies over here, I believe, and they sent her out to us in Canada.”

Jane turned to look at the speaker. He was a stranger, a very young man, brought that evening to the house by some friends, and introduced. His name, Vaughan, had not struck upon any chord of Jane’s memory at the time; but it did now, in connection with the name of Beauchamp. Could he indeed be a member of that family in Canada to whom the Miss Beauchamp had gone out?

“And she is an efficient governess?” went on one of the voices. It was a lady speaking now.

"Very much so, indeed," replied Mr. Vaughan. "I have heard my mother say she does not know what she should do without Miss Beauchamp."

All her pulses throbbing with expectant hope, Jane moved up and laid her finger on Mr. Vaughan's arm.

"Are you from Canada?"

"From Lower Canada," he replied, struck with something of suppressed eagerness in her tone. "My father, Colonel Vaughan, was ordered there some years ago with his regiment, and he took his family with him. Liking the place, we have remained there, and——"

"You live near to Montreal?" interrupted Jane, too anxious to allow him to continue.

"We live at Montreal."

"I heard you speak of a Miss Beauchamp: a governess, if I understood you arightly?"

"Yes, I was speaking of Miss Beauchamp. She is my sisters' governess. She came out to us from England."

"How long ago?"

"How long ago?—let me see," he deliberated. "I don't think she has been with us much more than a twelvemonth yet."

It was surely the same. Jane without ceremony placed her arm within the young man's, and led him to a less-crowded room.

"I am interested in a Miss Beauchamp, Mr. Vaughan," she said, as they paced it together. "A lady of that name, whom I know, went abroad as governess about a year ago. At least, we suppose she went abroad, though we don't know with certainty where. I am very anxious to find her. I think the Miss Beauchamp you speak of may be the same."

"I shouldn't wonder," returned the young gentleman. "This one's uncommonly nice looking, Lady Jane."

"So was she. I should tell you that we have been making inquiries, and had learnt that a Miss Beauchamp went to Montreal in Canada about twelve months ago. That lady no doubt is the one in your house: it may be the one we are wishing to find. We have already sent out letters to ascertain, and are expecting their answers every day. How long have you been in England?"

"Not a fortnight yet. I asked Miss Beauchamp if I could call on any of her friends in England with news of her; but she said she had none that she cared to send to."

"It can be no other than Clarice!" murmured Jane in her inmost heart. "I am sure it must be the same," she said aloud. "Can you describe her to me, Mr. Vaughan?"

"I can almost show her to you if I can catch

sight of a young lady I was dancing with just now," he replied. "I kept thinking how like she was to Miss Beauchamp."

"A pretty little girl in a white crape frock and with a white wreath in her hair," said Jane, eagerly, remembering how great a resemblance Lucy bore to Clarice.

"I—no, I don't think she wore a wreath," returned Mr. Vaughan. "And she was not little. She—there she is! there she is!" he broke off in quick excitement. "That's the one; the lady in the blue dress, with some gold stuff in her hair. You can't think how much she is like Miss Beauchamp."

Jane's spirit turned faint. It was another disappointment. The young lady he pointed to was a Miss Munro, a very tall girl, with a remarkably light complexion and light-blue eyes. No imagination, however suggestive, could have traced the slightest resemblance between that young lady and Clarice Chesney.

"*She!*" exclaimed Jane. "Has Miss Beauchamp—your Miss Beauchamp—a complexion light as that? Has she blue eyes?"

"Yes. Miss Beauchamp is one of the fairest girls I ever saw. Her hair is light flaxen, very silky-looking, and she wears it in curls. It's just like the hair you see upon fair-complexioned dolls."

"It is not the same," said Jane, battling with her disappointment as she best might. "The Miss Beauchamp I speak of has large soft brown eyes and brown hair. She is about as tall as I am."

"Then that sets the question at rest, Lady Jane," returned the young man, alluding to the eyes and hair. "And our Miss Beauchamp is very tall. As tall as that lady standing there."

He pointed to Miss Lethwait. Jane withdrew her eyes in aversion, and they fell on Lucy. She made a sign to the child, and Lucy ran up, her brown eyes sparkling, her dark hair flowing, the bright rose shining in her damask cheeks.

"There is a resemblance in this young lady's face to the one I have been speaking of, Mr. Vaughan. The eyes and hair and complexion are just alike."

"Is there? Why that's—somebody told me that was little Lady Lucy Chesney—your sister, of course, Lady Jane. She's very pretty, but she's not a bit like Miss Beauchamp."

Was it to be ever so? Should they come seemingly on the very track of Clarice, only to find their hopes mocked? Things seemed to be going all the wrong way to-night with Jane Chesney.

CHAPTER VIII.

TURNED AWAY.

LADY JANE CHESNEY sat in the small drawing-room. It was nearly the only room that the servants had put into habitable order since the revelry of the previous night. Possibly Miss Lethwait may have deemed that to be the reason why her breakfast was that morning served apart. In the simple-mannered household, the governess had hitherto taken her meals with the family; but Jane would not again sit down to the same board with one who had so forgotten herself. Lucy, by Jane's orders, was allowed to remain later in bed.

Lord Oakburn had taken his breakfast with Jane in this same small drawing-room. Everything in the house seemed at sixes and sevens, and he made no remark upon the absence of the governess and Lucy. His lordship was expending all his superfluous breath in a tirade against party-giving.

"Where's the use of it, after all?" he asked of

Jane. "What end does it answer? Here we have got the house turned topsy-turvy just for the sake of two or three hours' crush! Two or three hours! All that trouble for just two or three hours! There's no sense in it, Jane. What good does it do? Who benefits by it? The folks have the trouble of dressing themselves, and they come out for an hour, and then go back and undress!—wishing themselves quiet at home all the while. We shall be two days getting straight. The thing's just this, Jane: it may be all very well for those people who keep a full set of servants in each department to enter on the folly, but it's an awful bother to those who don't. Catch me giving one next year! If you must give it on your own score, my Lady Jane, I shall go out the while."

Did the thought cross the earl's mind as he spoke, that ere the next year should dawn, Lady Jane would no longer be his house's mistress? Most probably: for he suddenly ceased in his grumbling, drank down his tea at a gulp, and quitted the room, Jane vainly reminding him that he had made less breakfast than usual.


She had the things taken away, and she got her housekeeping book—for Jane was an exact account-keeper still—and made out what was due to Miss Lethwait. She had not been with them three months yet, but Jane would pay her as though she

had. Ringing the bell, Pompey came in answer to it.

"Desire Miss Lethwait to step here," said Jane.

Miss Lethwait came in at once. It was an idle hour with her, Lucy being yet in her room. She was dressed rather more than usual, in a handsome gown that she generally wore to church on a Sunday: a sort of fancy material with rich colours in it. Had she put it on in consequence of her new position in relation to Lord Oakburn?—to look well in his eye? There was little doubt of it. All night long she had lain awake: her brain, her mind, her thoughts in a tumult; the hot blood coursing fiercely through her veins at the glories that awaited her. One moment these glories seemed very near; real, tangible, *sure*: the next, they faded away to darkness, and she said to herself that probably Lord Oakburn had only spoken in the passing moment's delusion: a delusion which would fade away with the morning light.

The torment, the uncertainty did not cease with the day, and it brought a rich colour to her pale face, rarely seen there; never save in moments of deep emotion. As she entered Lady Jane's presence with this bloom on her cheeks and the purple light shining from her magnificent hair, her handsome gown rustling behind her and her fine figure drawn



to its full height, even Jane, with all her prejudice, was struck with her real grandeur.

It did not soften Jane one bit; nay, it had the opposite effect. How haughty Jane could be when she chose, this moment proved. She was sitting herself, but she did not invite the governess to sit: she pointed imperiously with her hand for her to stand, there, on the other side the table, as she might have pointed to a servant. In her condemnation of wrong-doing, Jane Chesney did not deem the governess fit to sit in her presence.

"Miss Lethwait, I find it inexpedient to retain you in my household," began Jane, in a coldly civil tone. "It will not inconvenience you, I hope, to leave to-day."

To say that Miss Lethwait gazed at Lady Jane in consternation, would be saying little. Never for a moment had she feared her to have been in any way cognisant of the previous night's little episode in the smoking-room; she had but supposed this present summons had reference to some matter or other connected with Lucy. The words fell upon her like a shock, and she could only stand in astonishment.

"I beg your pardon, Lady Jane," she said, when she found her tongue. "*Leave*, did you say? Leave to-day!"

"You will oblige me by so doing," calmly replied Jane.

Miss Lethwait stood before Lady Jane in silence. That calmness is so difficult to contend against! She might have met it better had her ladyship only been in a passion.

"May I ask the reason of this sudden dismissal?" she at length murmured, with a rush of fear that Lady Jane must have been in some obscure corner of the smoking-room and seen the kiss.

"I would prefer that you did not ask me the reason," replied Jane. "Possibly you might find it in your own conscience if you searched. There are things which to the refined mind are derogatory even to think of, utterly obnoxious to speak upon. I had deemed you a gentlewoman, Miss Lethwait. I am grieved that I was mistaken: and I bitterly regret having placed you in charge of Lady Lucy Chesney."

All that Miss Lethwait possessed of fiery anger rose up to boiling heat. Lady Jane's tone was so stinging, so quietly contemptuous: as if she, the governess, were no longer worthy of any other. The taunt as to the gentlewoman told home.

Retorting words rose to her tongue; but ere the lips gave utterance to them, prudence came to her, and they were choked down. A scene now with

Lady Jane, and she might never be the Countess of Oakburn. The scarlet hue of emotion tinged her cheek, deep and glowing, as it had on the previous night; but she compelled herself to endure, and stood in silence.

"There is due to you a balance of six pounds," resumed Jane; "and five pounds in lieu of the customary month's warning will make it eleven. In justice I believe I ought also to advance to you money for the month's board: if you will name any sum you may deem suitable, I——"

"I beg your pardon, *that* is not customary," passionately interrupted Miss Lethwait. "I could not accept anything of the kind."

"Then I believe you will find this correct," said Jane, placing a ten-pound note and a sovereign on the table. And Miss Lethwait after a moment's hesitation took them up.

"I am sorry to have incurred your displeasure, Lady Jane," she said, her anger subsiding. "Perhaps you will think better of me sometime."

The tone, in spite of herself, was one of deprecation. It grated on Jane Chesney's ear. She raised her haughty eyelids and bent on the governess one long look of condemnation.

"Never," she answered with more temper than she had hitherto shown. "Your duties in this house are finished, Miss Lethwait. Any assistance

that you may require in packing, I beg you will ring for. And I would prefer—I would very much prefer that you should not see Lady Lucy previous to your departure.”

“Put out of the house like a dog!” murmured the unlucky governess to her own rebellious spirit. “But the tables may be turned; yes, they may be turned ere many months shall have gone by!”

Jane moved her hand and bowed her from her presence, coldly civil, grandly courteous. She vouchsafed no other leave-taking, and the governess went forth from her presence, her cheeks hot with their scarlet tinge. Not many times in her life had that scarlet dyed the face of Eliza Lethwait.

Outside the door she paused in indecision. In spite of all that had passed, she was not deficient in maidenly reticence, and to search out Lord Oakburn went against her. But it was necessary he should know of this dismissal, if the past night's offer were to be regarded as an earnest one.

She went swiftly down the stairs and found the earl in the small apartment that Lucy had called his smoking-room. He would go there sometimes in a morning if he had letters to write. The earl was seated, leaning over an open letter, his stick lying on the table beside it. He looked up when she entered.

“Lady Jane has dismissed me, Lord Oakburn.”

She spoke in no complaining tone, in no voice of anger. Rather in sadness, as if she had merited the dismissal. The earl did not take in the sense of the words; he had been buried in a reverie, and it seemed that he could not at once awake from it.

"What?" cried he.

"I am sorry to say that Lady Jane has dismissed me," she repeated.

"What's that for?" he demanded, awaking fully to the words now, and his voice and his stick were alike raised.

"Lady Jane did not explain. She called me in, told me I could not remain, and that she wished me to depart at once. I could not quit the house without telling you, Lord Oakburn, and—and—if you please—giving you my address. I shall go to my father's."

"Shiver my timbers if you shall go out of my house in this way!" stormed the earl, striking his stick on the table. "My Lady Jane's a cool hand when she chooses, I know; but you have a right to proper warning."

Miss Lethwait extended her hand, and exhibited the money in its palm.

"Lady Jane has not forgotten to give me the warning's substitute," she said, with a proud, bitter smile.

"Then hark you, my dear! I am the house's

master, and I'll let my lady know that I am. You shall not——"

"Stay, Lord Oakburn—I beg your pardon," she interrupted. "I could not remain in the house in defiance of Lady Jane. You have not thought, perhaps, how impossible it would be for one in my subordinate capacity to enter the lists of opposition against her. Indeed it could not be."

Lord Oakburn growled. But he made no answer. Possibly the good sense of the argument was forcing itself upon him.

"You belong to me now," he presently said. "I won't have you turned out like this."

"I shall be happier at home," she resumed. "In any case, I must have left shortly, if—if—I mean," she broke off, stammering and hesitating, for she did not like openly to allude to her new prospects until they were more assured—"I must have left your roof before——"

"Before you re-enter it as my wife," interposed the earl, calming down. "Be it so. I don't know but you are right. And when you do enter it, it will be your turn, you know, to cock-pit it over my Lady Jane."

Miss Lethwait felt that Lady Jane was not one to allow her or anybody else to "cock-pit" it over her: and a dark shade seemed to rise up in her mind and shadow forth a troubled future.

A question from Lord Oakburn interrupted its gloom.

"When shall you be ready?"

"In an hour's time," she answered. "I have not much luggage to put up."

"Not for leaving here," cried the earl, correcting her mistake somewhat hotly, "When shall you be ready for the splicing?"

"For the splicing?" she faltered.

"For the marriage. Don't you understand? In a week?"

"Oh, Lord Oakburn! Putting other and weightier considerations aside, I could not be ready in a week."

"What are the weighty considerations?"

"The—the seemliness—the fitness of things," she answered, growing rather nervous. "My preparations would take me some weeks, Lord Oakburn."

"Preparations take some weeks!" echoed the earl, opening his eyes in astonishment. "What, for a wedding? I never heard of such a thing. Why, I could fit out my sea-chest in a day for a three-years' cruise! What d'ye mean, Miss Lethwait?"

Miss Lethwait did not feel equal to disputing the outfitting point with him. All that could be settled later. She gave him her father's address at his

country vicarage, Twifford ; and Lord Oakburn told her he should be at it almost as soon as she was.

"Then, now that I have told you, I will hasten my departure," she said, turning to put aside the velvet curtain for her exit. "Lady Jane will not be pleased if I linger. Fare you well, Lord Oakburn."

"Yes, I suppose it's better that you should go," acquiesced the earl. "I don't mean to tell her; you see, until it's done and over. Just come close, my dear."

She went up to him. She supposed he had something particular to say to her ; some direction to tender.

"Just give me a kiss."

The gallant peer had not risen, and she would have to stoop to his up-turned face. It was certainly reversing the general order of such things. For a single moment her whole spirit rose up in rebellion ; the next, she had bent her face passively to his.

With his single kiss upon her lips, with the red blood dyeing her brow, with a choking sob of emotion, she went from his presence and ascended to her chamber. Lucy ran out from the adjoining one ere she could enter it. The child, who had grown fond of her governess in spite of the dreadful German exercises, threw her arms round her.

"Oh, was it not a charming party ! I wish we

could have one every night! And how good you are, Miss Lethwait, to give me holiday to-day, What are you going to do?"

"Lucy, dear, the holiday is not of my giving. I am going from you. I am not to teach you any longer. I shall have departed in an hour's time."

"What's that for?" exclaimed Lucy, in very astonishment.

And then, and not until then, did it recur to Miss Lethwait's remembrance that Lady Jane had desired her not to see Lucy before she left. The request had brought its sting to Miss Lethwait: had her ladyship feared she would contaminate the child?—but she had never meant to disobey it. There was no help for it now.

"Are you not going to be my governess any longer?" questioned Lucy.

"I am sorry to have mentioned this, Lucy," she murmured in contrition. "I ought not to have spoken to you. Will you kindly tell Lady Jane that I spoke in inadvertence, not intentionally; and that I am sorry to have done so?"

"But, Miss Lethwait——"

"But I cannot tell you anything," was the interruption of the governess. "It may chance, my dear, that we shall meet again at some future time. I am not sure. What seems certain one day

vanishes the next. But you may believe one thing, Lucy—that I shall always love you.”

She pushed the pretty arms away from her, and bolted herself in her chamber. Lucy flew to the breakfast-room. It was in the hands of the servants: it had been the supper-room of the previous night.

“Where’s Lady Jane?” asked the child, surveying the *débris* before her with interest.

The servants did not know, unless her ladyship was in the small drawing-room, and Lucy went to the small drawing-room in search of her.

Jane was there. She had been shut up there quietly with her housekeeping book since the dismissal of the governess; but she had risen now to go to Lord Oakburn.

“O Jane! Is Miss Lethwait really going?”

“Yes,” calmly replied Jane.

“Why? I am so sorry.”

“Hush, Lucy.”

“But you’ll tell me why, Jane? What has she done?”

“You must not ask, my dear. These things do not concern you. I will take your lessons myself until I can find some one to fill Miss Lethwait’s place, more suitable than she is.”

“But Jane——”

“I cannot tell you anything more, Lucy,” was

the peremptory answer. "It is enough for you to know that Miss Lethwait is discharged, and that she quits the house to-day. I am very sorry that she ever entered it."


Leaving the little girl standing there, Jane went down to Lord Oakburn. He was seated in just the same position as when interrupted by Miss Lethwait: himself in a reverie, and the open letter before him.

Jane drew the velvet curtain close, and told him she had been discharging the governess. She found that she was unsuitable for her charge, was all the explanation she gave. Jane had taken her knitting in her hand, and she sat with her eyes bent upon it while she spoke; never raising them; saying as little as she possibly could say. It was terribly unpleasant to Jane to mention that name to her father, after what she had seen in that very room on the previous night.

The earl made no interruption. It may be, that Jane had feared she knew not what of question and objection; but he heard her in silence. He never said a word until she had finished, and then not much.

"It was rather cool of you to dismiss her without warning, my lady. A harsh measure."

A rosy flush tinged Jane's delicate features. "I think not, papa."



"As you please," returned the earl. "And now what's to be done about Clarice?"

The question took her by surprise. Lord Oakburn pointed to the open letter.

"I got this letter this morning, Jane. We have been mistaken in supposing that it was Clarice who went to Canada. It was another Miss Beauchamp."

"Oh yes, papa, I know it," returned Jane, in much distress, as she reverted to the disappointment imparted by Mr. Vaughan. "I begin—I begin to despair of finding her."

"Then you are a simpleton for your pains," retorted the earl. "Despair of finding her! What next? She has gone on the Continent with some family, and is put down in their passport as 'the governess;' that's what it is. Despair of finding her, indeed! I shall go off to that governess-agency place, and ask what they meant by leading us to believe that it was the same Miss Beauchamp."


In his hot haste, his impulsive temper, the earl rose and departed there and then, hurling no end of anathemas at the unlucky Pompey, who could not at the first moment, in the general disarrangement, lay his hands on his master's hat. And ere the sun was high at noon, the governess had quitted the house, *as* governess, for ever.

CHAPTER IX.

AS IRON ENTERING INTO THE SOUL.

THE Earl of Oakburn was in a bustle. The earl was one of those people who always are in a bustle when starting upon a journey, be it ever so short a one. He was going on a visit to Sir James Marden at Chesney Oaks, and he was putting himself in a commotion over it.

To Jane's surprise he had announced an intention not to take Pompey. Jane wondered how he would get on without that faithful and brow-beaten follower, if only in the light of an object to roar at; and when she asked the earl the reason for not taking him, he had civilly replied that it was no business of hers. Jane felt sorry for the decision, for she believed Pompey to be essential to her father's comforts; and she knew the earl, with all his temper, liked the old servant, and was glad to have him about him; but otherwise Jane attached no importance to the matter. So the earl was driven to the Paddington station, and Pompey, after seeing his master and his carpet-bag safely in an



express train, returned with the carriage to Portland Place.

Jane Chesney was a little busy on her own score just now, for she was seeking a governess to replace Miss Lethwait; one who should prove to be a more desirable inmate than that lady had been. Jane blamed herself greatly for not having inquired more minutely into Miss Lethwait's antecedents; she had been, as she thought now, too much prepossessed in her favour at first sight, had taken her too entirely upon trust. That Jane would not err again on that score, her present occupation was proving—that of searching out the smallest details in connection with the lady now recommended to her, a Miss Snow. Not many days yet had Miss Lethwait quitted the house, but Jane had forcibly put her out of remembrance. Never, willingly, would she think again upon one, whose conduct in that one particular, the episode to which Jane had been a witness the night of the party, had been so entirely obnoxious.


Lord Oakburn was whirled along that desirable line for travellers, the Great Western. In the opposite corner of the comfortable carriage there happened to be another old naval commander sitting, and the terms that the two got upon were so good, that his lordship could not believe his eyes when he saw the well-known station at Pembury, or believe that they had already reached it.

He had, however, to part with his new acquaintance, for Pembury station was his alighting point. He found Sir James Marden's carriage waiting for him, a sort of mail phaeton, Sir James himself, a little man with a yellow face, seated in the box seat. The earl and his carpet-bag were duly installed in it, and Sir James drove out of the station.

As they were proceeding up the street to take the avenue for Chesney Oaks,—the pleasant avenue, less green now than it had been in spring, which wound through the park to the house,—a small carriage, drawn by a pair of beautiful ponies, came rapidly down upon them. Not more beautiful in their way, those ponies, than were the ladies seated in the carriage. Two gay, lovely ladies, laughing and talking with each other, their veils and their streamers and their other furbelows, flying behind them in the wind. The one, driving, was Colonel Marden's wife, and she was about to rein in and greet Sir James, when her companion, with a half-smothered cry and a sudden paleness displacing the rich bloom on her cheeks, seized the reins and sent the ponies onward at a gallop. It was Lady Laura Carlton.

"Holloa!" exclaimed Sir James, "what was that for?"

Lord Oakburn, in his surprise, had started up in the phaeton. About the last person he had been thinking of was Laura, and Pembury was about the



last place he would have expected to see her in. The fact was, Laura had recently met Mrs. Marden at a friend's house near Great Wennock; the two ladies had struck up a sudden friendship, and Laura had come back with her for a few days' visit.

"She was evidently scared at the sight of one of us, and I'm sure I never met her before to my knowledge," cried Sir James, alluding to the lady seated with Mrs. Marden. "Do you know her, Lord Oakburn?"

"Know her!" repeated the earl, rather explosively. "I'm sorry to say I do know her, sir. She is an ungrateful daughter of mine, who ran away from her home to be married to a fellow, and never asked my leave."

"It must be Lady Laura Carlton!" quickly exclaimed Sir James Marden.

"It is," said the earl. "And I assure you I'd give a great deal out of my pocket if she were Lady Laura Anybody-else."

"You'll have to forgive her, I suppose. What a handsome girl she is!"

"No, I shan't have to forgive her," returned the earl, much offended at the suggestion. "I don't intend to forgive her."

Brave words, no doubt. But who knows what would have come of the interview had that pony

carriage been allowed to stop? It might have been a turning point in Laura's life, might have led to a reconciliation—for Lord Oakburn's bark was worse than his bite, and he did love his children. But Laura Carlton, in her startled fear at seeing him so close to her, had herself given the check and the impetus, and the opportunity was gone by forever.

"What brings her at Pembury?" growled the earl, as they drove through the park.

"I can't tell," replied Sir James. "I conclude she must be visiting at my brother's."

"I didn't know she was acquainted with them," was the comment of the earl. "Forgive a clandestine marriage! No, never!"

Brave words again of the Earl of Oakburn's! Clandestine marriages are not good in themselves, and they often work incalculable ill, entailing embarrassing consequences on more than one generation. But the condemnation would have come with better grace from another than Lord Oakburn, seeing that he was contemplating something of the sort on his own account.

He slept one night at Chesney Oaks, and then he concluded his visit. Sir James Marden was surprised and vexed at the abrupt termination. He set it down to the unwelcome presence of the earl's rebellious daughter at Pembury, and he pressed

Lord Oakburn's hand at parting, and begged him to come again shortly, at a more convenient period.

But most likely Lord Oakburn had never intended a longer stay. The probabilities were—it's hard, you know, to have to write it of a middle-aged earl, a member of the sedate and honourable Upper House—that he had only taken Chesney Oaks as a blind to his daughters on his way to Miss Lethwait. For his real visit was to her.

Chesney Oaks was situated in quite an opposite part of the kingdom to Twifford vicarage, but by taking advantage of cross rails, Lord Oakburn contrived to reach Twifford late that same night. He did not intrude on them until the following morning. The house, a low one, covered with ivy, was small and unpretending, but exceedingly picturesque; its garden was beautiful, and the birds made their nests and sang in the clustering trees that surrounded the lawn and flowers.

In features they were very much alike, but in figure no two could be much more dissimilar than the father and daughter. The vicar was a little shrunken man, particularly timid in manner; his daughter magnificent as a queen. If she had looked queenly in the handsomely proportioned rooms of the earl's town house, how much more so did she look in the miniature little parlour of the vicarage.

Lord Oakburn entered upon his business in his usual blunt fashion. He had come down, he said, to make acquaintance with Mr. Lethwait, and to know when the wedding was to be.

The vicar replied by stating that Eliza had told him all. And he, the father, was deeply sensible of the honour done her by the Earl of Oakburn, and that he himself should be proud and pleased to see her his wife; but that he felt a scruple upon the point, as did Eliza. He felt that her entrance into the family might be very objectionable to the earl's daughters.

And, knowing what you do know of the earl, you may be sure that that speech was the signal for an outburst. He poured forth a torrent of angry eloquence in his peculiar manner, so completely annihilating every argument but his own, that the timid clergyman never dared to utter another word of objection. The earl must have it his own way: as it had been pretty sure from the first he would have it.

"Eliza has been a good and dutiful daughter, my lord," said the vicar, who in his retired life, his humble home, had hardly ever been brought into contact with one of the earl's social degree. "My living has been very small, and my expenses have been inevitably large—that is, large for one in my position. The last years of my wife's life were

years of illness ; she suffered from a complaint that required constant medical attendance and expensive nourishment, and Eliza was to us throughout almost as a guardian angel. Every penny she could spare from her own absolute expenses, she sent to us. She has put up with undesirable places, where the discomforts were great, the insults hard to be borne, and would not throw herself out, lest we might suffer. She has been a *good* daughter," he emphatically added ; "she will, I hesitate not to say it, make a good wife. And if only your lordship's daughters will——"

Another interrupting burst from his lordship : his daughters had nothing to do with it, and he did not intend that they should have. And the vicar was finally silenced.

The earl did things like nobody else. He had spent the best part of his life at sea, and shore ideas and proprieties were still almost to him as a closed book. In discussing the arrangements of the marriage with Miss Lethwait—for he compelled her to discuss them, and he did it in a perfectly matter-of-fact manner, just as he might have discussed a debate in the Lords—she found herself obliged to hint, as he did not, that a tour, long or short, inland or foreign, as might be convenient, was usually deemed eligible on that auspicious occasion. The earl could not be brought to see it ; did not under-


stand it. What on earth was the matter with his house at home that they could not proceed direct to it on their wedding day? he demanded. Were there a brig convenient they might enjoy a month's cruise in her, and he'd say something to it, or even a well-built yacht; but he hated land travelling, and was not going to encounter it.

Miss Lethwait thought of the horrors of sea-sickness, and left the brig and yacht to drop into abeyance. Neither dared she, in the timidity of her new position, urge the tour further upon him; but she did shrink from being taken home to the midst of his daughters on the marriage day.

On the following day the earl went back to town, Miss Lethwait having succeeded in postponing the period of the marriage until October.

September was a busy month with Jane Chesney. The term for which they had engaged their present furnished residence was expiring, and Lord Oakburn took on lease one of the neighbouring houses in Portland Place.

Jane was in her element. Choosing furniture and planning out arrangements for their new home was welcome work, all being done with one primary object—the comfort of her father. The best rooms were appropriated to him, the best things were placed in them. Jane thought how happy they should be together, she and her father, in this



settled homestead. They did not intend to go out of town that year : why should they ? they had but a few months entered it. Custom ? Fashion ? The earl did not understand custom, and fashion was as a foreign ship to him. Jane only cared for what he cared.

They moved into the house the last week in September, Jane anxious with loving cares still. But for the mysterious and prolonged absence of Clarice, she would have been thoroughly and completely happy. Miss Snow was proving an efficient governess for Lucy, and Jane had leisure on her hands. The unpleasant episode in the reign of the last governess, Eliza Lethwait, had nearly faded from Jane Chesney's memory, and she no more dreamt of connecting that condemned lady with certain occasional short absences of the earl in the country, than she dreamt of attributing them to visits paid to the Great Mogul.

The first week in October came in, and the evenings were getting wintry. Lord Oakburn had been away from home three days, and Jane, who had just got the house into nice condition, and was resting from her labours, had leisure to feel ill. Not actually ill, perhaps ; but anything but well. She had felt so all day, a sick shivery feeling that she could not account for, a low-spirited sensation, as of some approaching evil. Do coming events

thus cast their shadows before? There are those who tell us that they do. Not in that way, however, was Jane Chesney superstitious, or did she think of attributing her sensations to any such mystical cause. She "felt out of sorts," she said to Lucy's governess, and supposed she had caught cold.

Causing a fire to be lighted in her dressing-room, a little snugery on the second floor adjoining her bed-room, she resolved to make herself comfortable there for the evening. She ordered the tea-tray to be brought up, and sent a message for Miss Snow and Lucy.

Miss Snow, a little, lively, warm-mannered woman, the very reverse of the dignified Miss Lethwait, was full of trifling cares for Lady Jane. She threw a warm shawl on her shoulders, she insisted on wrapping her feet in flannel as they rested on the footstool before the fire, and she asked permission to make and pour out the tea.

Judith was at that moment bringing in the tea-tray. Judith—I'm sure I forget whether this has been mentioned before—had taken the place of own maid to Jane and Lucy when the change occurred in their fortunes. Jane valued her greatly, and the girl was deserving of it.

"A gentleman has called to inquire when the earl will be at home, my lady," she said, as she put

down the tray. "He wishes very particularly to see him."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Jane, rather listlessly. "Who is it?"

"It is that same gentleman who has been here occasionally on Sir James Marden's business," replied Judith. "I heard him say to Wilson as I came through the hall that he had had a communication from Chesney Oaks, which he wished the earl to see as soon as possible. Wilson asked me if I'd bring the message to your ladyship."

Jane turned her head in some slight surprise. "A communication from Chesney Oaks?" she repeated. "But papa is at Chesney Oaks. You can tell the gentleman so, Judith."

"No, Jane, papa's not at Chesney Oaks," interposed Lucy, who was dancing about the room with her usual restlessness. "If he had been going to Chesney Oaks he would have gone from the Paddington Station, wouldn't he?"

"Well?" said Jane.

"Well, he went to the King's Cross Station."

"How do you know?" asked Jane.

Lucy gave a deprecatory glance at Miss Snow ere she entered on her confession. She had run out to her papa after he was in the carriage for a last last kiss, and heard Pompey give the order to the coachman, "The King's Cross Station."

Jane shook her head. "You must have been mistaken, Lucy," she said. "I asked papa whether he was going to Chesney Oaks, and he—he—" Jane stopped a moment in recollection—"he nodded his head in the affirmative. It must have meant the affirmative," she added, slowly, as if debating the point with herself. "I am sure he is at Chesney Oaks."

"Shall I inquire of the coachman, my lady?" asked Judith. "He is down-stairs."

"Yes, do," replied Jane. "And you can tell the gentleman, Sir James Marden's agent, that I shall expect Lord Oakburn home daily until I see him. He seldom remains away above three days."

Judith went down on her errand, and came up again. Lucy was right. The coachman had driven his master to the King's Cross Station: the coachman further said that it was to the King's Cross Station he had driven his master on his recent absences. Jane wondered. She was not aware that Lord Oakburn knew any one on that line. This time he had taken Pompey with him.

Miss Snow busied herself with the tea; Lucy talked; Jane sat in listless idleness. And thus the time went on until a loud knock and ring resounded through the house. Jane lifted her eyes to the clock on the mantelpiece, and saw that it wanted ten minutes to nine.

"Visitors to-night!" she exclaimed, with vexation.

"Don't admit them, Lady Jane," spoke up Miss Snow impulsively, in her sympathy for Lady Jane. "You are not well enough."

Lucy had escaped from the room, and Miss Snow caught her at the dignified pastime of listening. Stretched over the balustrades as far as she could stretch, her ears and eyes were riveted to what was going on in the hall below. The governess administered a sharp reprimand and ordered her to come away. But Lucy was absorbed, and altogether ignored both Miss Snow and the mandate.

"Do you hear me speak to you, Lady Lucy? Must I come for you, then?"

Lucy drew away now, but not, as it appeared, in obedience to the governess. Her face wore a puzzled look of surprise, and she went back to the room on tiptoe.

"Jane," said she, scarcely above her breath, "Jane, what do you think? It is papa and Miss Lethwait."

Jane turned round on her chair. "What nonsense, Lucy! Miss Lethwait!"

"It is indeed, Jane. It looks just as though papa had brought her on a visit, and there's some luggage coming into the hall. Miss Lethwait——"

"It cannot be Miss Lethwait," sharply inter-

rupted Lady Jane, her tone betraying annoyance at the very mistake.

"Yes, it is Miss Lethwait," persisted Lucy. "She is dressed so well!—in a rich damask dress and a white bonnet, and an Indian shawl with a gold border. It is just like that Indian shawl of mamma's that you never remove from the drawer and never wear, because you say it puts you too much in mind of her."

"Lucy, you must certainly be dreaming!" reiterated Jane. "Miss Lethwait would never dare to step inside our house again. If——"

Jane stopped. Wilson the footman had come up the stairs, and his face wore a blank look.

"I beg your pardon, my lady: the earl has arrived."

"Well?" said Jane.

"He ordered me to come up to you, my lady, and ask whether there was nobody to receive him and—and—Lady Oakburn."

"Bade you ask WHAT?" demanded Jane, bending her haughty eyelids on the servant.

"My lady," returned the man, thinking he would give the words as they were given to him, and then perhaps he should escape anger, "what his lordship said was this: 'Go up and see where they are, and ask what's the reason that nobody is about, to receive Lady Oakburn.' They were the exact words, my lady."

"Is it my aunt, the Dowager Lady Oakburn?" asked Jane in her wonder.


"It is Miss Lethwait, my lady. That is to say, she as was Miss Lethwait when she lived here."

Lucy was right, then! A ghastly hue overspread the face of Jane Chesney. Not at the unhappy fact—which as yet, strange to say, had not dawned on her mind—but at the insult offered to her by this re-entrance of the governess into their house. Who was she, this Eliza Lethwait, that she should come again, and beard her in her home? Had he, her father, brought her—brought her on a visit, as surmised by Lucy?

The footman had already gone down-stairs again. Jane flung aside Miss Snow's wrapperings and prepared to descend. The governess had stood in a state of puzzled amazement, wondering what it all meant. On the stairs Jane encountered Judith. The girl was paler than usual, and very grave.

"My lady," she whispered, arresting Jane's progress, "do you know what has occurred?"

"I know that that person whom I turned from my house has dared to intrude into it again," answered Lady Jane in her wrath, speaking far more openly than it was her custom to speak before a servant. "But she shall not stop in it; no, not for an hour. Let me pass, Judith."



"Oh, my lady, hear the worst before you go in; before you enter upon a contest with her that perhaps she'd gain," implored Judith, in her eager sympathy for her mistress. "My lord has married her, and has brought her home."

Jane fell against the wall and looked at Judith, a pitiable expression of helplessness on her face. The girl resumed.

"Pompey says they were married yesterday morning; were married by Miss Lethwait's father in his own church. He says, my lady, he finds it is to Miss Lethwait's the earl has gone lately when he has been absent from town; not to Chesney Oaks."

"Support me, Judith," was the feeble prayer of the unhappy daughter.

Utterly sick and faint was she, and but for Judith's help she would have fallen. She sunk down on the friendly stairs, and let her head rest on them until the faintness had passed. Then she rose, staggering, and went on with what feeble strength was left her.

"I must know the worst," she moaned. "I must know the worst."

Lucy, wondering and timid, stole into the drawing-room after her. Standing by its fire, her face turned to the door in expectation, was she who had quitted the house as Miss Lethwait, only six or

seven weeks before. Jane's eyes fell on her dress, as mentioned by Lucy, the rich sweeping silk, the pretty white bonnet, and the costly shawl—*their own mother's shawl!* taken by the earl from its resting place to bestow on his new bride. Woman's mind is a strange compound of strength and littleness; and to see that shawl on *her* shoulders brought to Jane's heart perhaps the keenest pang of all. The earl was striding the room; his stick, suspiciously restless, coming down loudly with each step. He confronted his two daughters.

"So! here you are at last! And nothing ready, that I see, in the shape of welcome. Not so much as the tea laid! What's the reason, Lady Jane?"

"We did not expect you," replied Jane in a low tone, her back turned on the ex-governess.

"You got my letter. Wasn't it plain enough?"

"I have not received any letter."

"Not received any letter! By Jove! I'll prosecute the post-office! Girls," with a flourish of his hand towards his wife—"here's your new mother, Lady Oakburn. You don't want a letter to welcome *her*."

It seemed that Jane, at any rate, wanted something, if not a letter. She persistently ignored the presence of the lady, keeping her face turned to her father. But when she tried to address him, no sound issued from her white and quivering lips.

The new countess came forward, and humbly, deprecatingly, held out her hand to Jane.

"Lady Jane, I implore you, let there be peace between us. Suffer me to sue for it. It has pleased Lord Oakburn to make me his wife; but indeed I have not come here to interfere with his daughters' privileges or to sow dissension in their home. *Try* and like me, Lady Jane! It will not be difficult to me to love you."

Jane wheeled round, her white lips trembling, her face ablaze with scorn.

"Like you!" she repeated, her voice, in her terrible emotion, rising to a hiss. "Like *you*! Can we like the serpent that entwines its deadly coils around its victim? You have brought your arts to bear on my unsuspecting father, and torn him from his children. As you have dealt with us, Eliza Lethwait, may you so be dealt with when your turn shall come!"

The countess drew back in agitation. She laid her hand on Lucy.

"You at least will let me love you, Lucy! I loved you when I was with you, and I will endeavour to be to you a second mother. This entrance into your home is as embarrassing and painful to me as to you."

Lucy burst into tears as she received the kiss pressed upon her lips. She had liked Miss Leth-

wait very much, but she did not like her to bring upon them this discomfort.

The earl and his stick, neither of them quite so brave as usual, went off to take refuge in the small room that they had made the library ; glad perhaps, if the truth could be known, that he had a refuge just then to hide himself in.

"It's new lines to them yet, Eliza," he called out as he went, for the benefit of his rebellious daughters. "To Jane especially. They haven't got their sea-legs on at present ; but it will be all right in a day or two. Or you shall ask them the reason why."

An exceedingly smart lady's-maid brushed past the earl, brushed past Jane, and addressed her mistress, with whom she had arrived.

"Your chamber is in order now, my lady, and what you'll want to-night unpacked. I thought your ladyship might like a fire, so I have had one lighted."

The countess passed out of the room, glad as the earl, perhaps, to make her escape. Jane grasped a chair in her heart-sickness.

Oh, reader ! surely you can feel for her ! She was hurled without warning from the post of authority in her father's home, in which she had been mistress for years ; *she was hurled from the chief place in her father's heart*. One whom she regarded as in every way beneath her, whom she

disliked and despised, over whom she had held control, was exalted into her place ; raised over her. She might have borne that bitterness : not patiently, but still she might have borne it : but what she could not bear was that another should become more to her father than she was. He whom she had so revered and loved, he in whom her very life had been bound up, had now taken to himself an idol—and Jane henceforth was nothing.

She dragged her aching limbs back to her dressing-room and cowered down before the fire with a low moan. Judith found her there. The girl had a letter in her hand.

“My lady, Pompey’s nearly out of his mind with alarm. He says he’d rather run away back to Africa than that his fault should become known to his master. My lord gave him a letter to post for you yesterday, and he forgot it, and has just found it in his pocket.”

Jane mechanically stretched out her hand for the letter ; mechanically opened it. It was short and pithy.

“Dear Jane :—I married Miss Lethwait this morning, and we shall be home to tea to-morrow ; have things ship-shape. You behaved ill to her when she was with us, and she felt it keenly, but you’ll take care to steer clear of that quicksand for

the future ; for remember she's my wife now, and will be the mistress of my home.

“ Your affectionate father,

“ OAKBURN.”

Jane crushed the letter in her hand and let her head fall, a convulsive sob that arose in her throat from time to time alone betraying her anguish. If ever the iron entered into the soul of woman, it had surely entered into that of Jane Chesney.

CHAPTER X.

BACK AT THE OLD HOME.

THEY stood together in the library—the earl and his daughter Jane. The morning sun streamed in at the window, playing on the fair smooth hair of Jane, showing all too conspicuously the paleness of her cheek, the utter misery of her countenance. The earl, looking bluff and uncomfortable, paced the carpet restlessly, his stick, for a wonder, lying unheeded in a corner.

It was their first meeting since the moment of his return the previous night. Ah, what a night it had been for Jane! Never for an instant had she closed her eyes. As she went to bed, so she rose; not having once lost consciousness of the blow that had been dealt out to her.

She had heard the earl go into the library, after his breakfast. He had taken it with the countess and Lucy. And Jane, drinking at a gulp the cup of tea brought to her, and which had stood neglected until it was cold, went down stairs and followed him in.

Not to reproach him ; not to cast a word of indignation on the usurping countess ; simply to speak of herself, and what her future course must be.

"This is no longer a home for me, papa," she quietly began, striving to subdue all outward token of emotion, of the bitter pain that was struggling within her. "I think you must see that it is not. Will you help me to another ?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Jane," said the earl, testily, wishing he was breasting the waves in a hurricane off the Cape, rather than in this dilemma. "It will all smooth down in a few days, if you'll only let it."

Jane lifted her eyes to him, a whole world of anguish in their depths. "*I could not stop here,*" she said, in a low tone, quite painful from its earnestness. "Papa, it would kill me."

And it seemed as if it really would kill her. Lord Oakburn grunted something unintelligible, and looked uncommonly ill-at-ease.

"You must let me go away, papa. Perhaps you will help me to another home ?"

"What home ? Where d'ye want to go ?" he crossly asked.

"I have been thinking that I could go to South Wennock," she said. "I cannot remain in London. The house at South Wennock has not let since we

left it ; it is lying useless there, with its furniture ; and, now that the winter is approaching, it will not be likely to let. Suffer me to go back there."

Lord Oakburn took a few strides up and down without reply. Jane stood, as before, near the table, one hand leaning on it, as if for support.

"It's the most rubbishing folly in the world, Jane ! You'd be as comfortable at home as ever you were, if you'd only bring your mind to it. Do you suppose she has come into the house to make things unpleasant for us ? You don't know her, if you think that. But there !—have it your own way ! If you'd like to go back to South Wenlock for the winter, you can."

"Thank you," answered Jane, with a suppressed sob. "You will allow me sufficient to live upon, papa ?"

"I'll see about that," said the earl, testily. "Let me know what you want, and I'll do what I can."

"I should like to continue in it, papa : to make it my home for life."

"Stuff, Jane ! Before you have been there six months you'll be right glad to come back to us."

"You will let me take Lucy, papa ?"

"No ; I'll be shot if I do !" returned the earl, raising his voice in choler. "I don't approve of your decamping off at all, though I give in to it ; but I will never permit Lucy to share in such

rebellion. You needn't say more, Jane. If my other daughters leave me, I will keep her."

Jane sighed as she gave up the thought of Lucy. She moved from the table, and held out her hand.

"Good-by, papa. I shall go to-day."

"Short work, my young lady," was the answer. "You'll come to see the folly of your whim speedily, I hope."

He shook hands. But, in his vexation and annoyance, he did not offer to kiss her, and he did not say "Good-by." Perhaps he felt vexed at himself as much as at Jane.

She went up to her room. Judith was busy at the dressing-table, and a maid was making the bed. Jane motioned to the latter to quit the chamber.

"I am going back to South Wennock, Judith, to live at the old house on the Rise. I leave for it to-day. Would you like to go, and remain with me?"

Judith looked too surprised to speak. She had a glass toilette-bottle in her hand, dusting it, and she laid it down in wonder. Jane continued:

"If you do not wish to go with me, I suppose you can remain here with Lady Lucy. They will want a maid for her, unless Lady Oakburn's is to attend on her. That can be ascertained."

"I will go with you, my lady," said Judith.

"I shall be glad if you will. But mine will be a

very quiet household. Only you and another, at the most."

"I would prefer to go with you, my lady."

"Then, Judith, let us make haste with the preparations. We must be away from this house to-day."

Scarcely had she spoken when Lucy came dancing in, her cheeks and her eyes glowing.

"O Jane! I hope we shall all be happy together!" she exclaimed. "I think we can be. Lady Oakburn is so kind. She means to get Miss Snow a nice situation, and to teach me herself. She says she will not entrust my education to anybody else."

"I am going away, Lucy," said Jane, drawing the little girl to her. "I wish—I *wish* I could have had you with me! But papa will not——"

"Going away?" repeated Lucy. "Where?"

"I am going back to South Wennock to live."

"O Jane! And to leave papa! What will he do without you?"

A spasm passed over Jane Chesney's face. "He has some one else now, Lucy."

Lucy burst into tears. "And I, Jane! What shall I do? You have never been away from me in all my life!"

A struggle with herself, and then Jane's tears burst forth. For the first time since the descending

of the blow. She laid her face on Lucy's neck, and sobbed aloud.

Only for a few moments did she suffer herself to indulge the grief. "I cannot afford 'this, child,'" she said; "I have neither time nor emotion to spare to-day. You must leave me, or I shall not be ready."

Lucy went down, her face wet. Lady Oakburn, who seemed to be taking to her new home and its duties quite naturally, was sorting some of Lucy's music in the drawing-room. She looked just as she had used to look as Miss Lethwait; but she wore this morning a beautiful dress of lama, shot with blue and gold, and a lace cap of guipure. Lucy's noisy entrance and noisy grief caused her to turn abruptly.

"My dear child, what is the matter?"

"Jane is going away," was the sobbing answer.

"Going away!" echoed the countess, not understanding.

"Yes, she is going back to live at South Wrennock, she says. She and Judith are packing up to go to-day."

Lady Oakburn was as one struck dumb. For a minute she could neither stir nor speak. Self-reproach was taking possession of her.

"Does your papa know of this, Lucy?"

"Oh yes, I think so," sobbed Lucy. "Jane said

she had asked papa to let me go with her, and he would not."

Lady Oakburn quitted the room and went in search of the earl. He was in the library still, pacing it with his stick now—the stick having just menaced poor Pompey's head, who had come in with a message.

"Lucy tells me that Lady Jane is about to leave," began the countess. "Oh, Lord Oakburn, it is what I feared! I would almost rather have died than come here to sow dissension in your house. Can nothing be done?"

"No, it can't," said the earl. "When Jane's determined upon a thing, she *is* determined. It's the fault of the family, my lady; as you'll find when you have been longer in it."

"But, Lord Oakburn——"

"My dear, look here. All the talking in the world won't alter it, and I'd rather hear no more upon the subject. Jane will go to South Wennock; but I daresay she'll come to her senses before she has lived there many months."

Did a recollection cross the earl's mind of another of his daughters, of whom he had used the self-same words? Clarice! *She* would come to her senses, he said, if let alone. But it seemed she had not come to them yet.

Lady Oakburn, more grieved, more desolate than

can well be imagined, for she was feeling herself to be a wretched interloper, in her lively conscientiousness, went upstairs to Jane's room and knocked at it. Jane was alone then. She was standing before a chest of drawers, taking out their contents. The countess was agitated, even to tears.

"O, Lady Jane, do not inflict this unhappiness upon me! I wish I had never entered the house, if the consequences are to involve your leaving it."

Jane turned, and stood, calm, impassive, scarcely deigning to raise her haughty eyelids.

"You should have thought of consequences before, madam."

"If you could know how very far from my thoughts it would be to presume in any way upon my position!" continued the countess, imploringly. "If you would consent to be still the mistress of the house, Lady Jane——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Jane, in a haughty tone of reproof, as if she would recall her to common sense. "My time is very short," she continued: "may I request to be left alone?"

Lady Oakburn saw there was no help for it—no remedy; and she turned to quit the room with a gesture of grief and pain. "I can only pray that the time may come when you will know me better, Lady Jane. Believe me, I would rather have died

than been the means of turning you from your home."

Taking leave of none but Lucy and Miss Snow, Lady Jane quitted the house with Judith in the course of the afternoon. Lord Oakburn had gone out: his wife, Jane would not see. And in that impromptu fashion Lady Jane returned to South Wennock, and took up her abode again in the old house, startling the woman who had charge of it.

The next day Jane wrote to her father. Her intention was to live as quietly as possible, she told him, keeping only two maids—Judith, to attend upon her personally, and a general servant—and a very modest sum indeed Jane named as an estimation of what it would cost her to live upon. But Lord Oakburn was more liberal, and exactly doubled it: in his answer he told her, her allowance would be at the rate of five hundred a year.

But the past trouble reacted upon Jane, and she became really ill. Mr. John Grey was called in to her. He found the sickness more of the mind than the body, and knew that time alone could work a cure.

"My dear lady, if I were to undertake you as a patient I should but be robbing you," he said to her, at his second interview. "Tonics? Well, you shall have some if you wish; but the best tonic will be time."

She saw that he divined how cruel had been the blow of the earl's marriage, the news of which had caused quite a commotion in South Wennock. Even this remote allusion to it Jane would have resented in some ; but there was that about Mr. Grey that seemed to draw her to him as a friend. She sat at the table in the little square drawing-room—little, as compared to some of the rooms to which she had lately been accustomed—and leaned her cheek upon her hand. Mr. Grey was seated on the other side the hearth, opposite to her. It was getting towards the dusk of evening, and the red blaze of the fire played on Jane's pale face.

"Yes," she acknowledged, "it is time alone that can do much for me, I believe. I feel—I feel that I shall never be blithe again. But I should like some tonic medicine, Mr. Grey."

"You shall have it, Lady Jane. I fancy you are naturally not very strong."

"Not very strong, perhaps. But I have hitherto enjoyed good health. Are there any changes at South Wennock?" she continued, not sorry to quit the subject of self.

"No, I think not," he answered; "nothing in particular, that would interest you. A few people have died; a few have married: as is the case in all places."

"Does Mr. Carlton get much practice?" she

asked, overcoming her repugnance to speak of that gentleman, in her wish for some information as to how he and Laura were progressing.


"He gets a great deal," said Mr. Grey. "The fact is, quite a tide has set in against my brother, and Mr. Carlton reaps the benefit."

"I do not understand," said Jane.

"People seem to have taken a dislike to my brother, on account of that unhappy affair in Palace Street," he explained. "Or rather, I should say, to distrust him. In short, people won't have Mr. Stephen Grey to attend them any longer: if I can't go, they run for Mr. Carlton, and thus he has now a great many of our former patients. South Wrenock is a terrible place for gossip; everybody must interfere with his neighbour's affairs. Just now," added Mr. John Grey, with a genial smile, "the town is commenting on Lady Jane Chesney's having called in me, instead of Mr. Carlton, her sister's husband."

Jane shook her head. "I dislike Mr. Carlton personally very much," she said. "Had he never entered our family to sow dissension in it, I should still have disliked him. But this must be a great trouble to Mr. Stephen Grey."

"It is a great annoyance. I wonder sometimes that Stephen puts up with it so patiently. 'It will come round with time,' is all he says."



"Has any clue been obtained to the unfortunate lady who died?" asked Jane.

"Not the slightest. She lies, poor thing, in the corner of St. Mark's Churchyard, unclaimed and unknown."

"But, has her husband never come forward to inquire after her?" exclaimed Lady Jane, in wonder. "It was said at the time, I remember, that he was travelling. Surely he must have returned?"

"No one whatever has come forward," was Mr. Grey's reply. "Neither he nor anybody else. In short, Lady Jane, but for that humble grave and the obloquy that has become the property of my brother Stephen, the whole affair might well seem a myth; a something that had only happened in a dream."

"Does it not strike you as being altogether very singular?" said Lady Jane, after a pause of thought. "The affair itself, I mean."

"Very much so indeed. It so impressed me at the time of the occurrence; far more than it did my brother."

"It would almost seem as though—as though the poor young lady had had no husband," concluded Lady Jane. "If it be not uncharitable to the dead to say so."

"That is the opinion I incline to," avowed Mr. John Grey. "My brother, on the contrary, will not entertain it; he feels certain, he says, that in that

respect things were as straight as they ought to be. But for one thing, I should adopt my opinion indubitably, and go on, as a natural sequence, to the belief that she herself introduced the fatal drops into the draught."

"And that one thing—what is it?" asked Jane, interested in spite of her own cares. But indeed the tragedy from the first had borne much interest for her—as it had for everybody else in South Wennock.


"The face that was seen on the stairs by Mr. Carlton."

"But I thought Mr. Carlton maintained afterwards that he had not seen any face there—that it was a misapprehension of his own?"

"Rely upon it, Mr. Carlton did see a face there, Lady Jane. The impression conveyed to his mind at the moment was, that a face—let us say a man—was there; and I believe it to have been a right one. The doubt arose to him afterwards with the improbability: and, for one thing, he may *wish* to believe that there was nobody, and to impress that belief upon others."

"But why should he wish to do that?" asked Jane.

"Because he must be aware that it was very careless of him not to have put the matter beyond doubt at the time. To see a man hovering in that



stealthy manner near a sick lady's room would be the signal for unearthing him to most medical attendants. It ought to have been so to Mr. Carlton ; and he is no doubt secretly taking blame to himself for not having done it."

"I thought he did search."

"Yes, superficially. He carried out a candle and looked around. But he should have remained on the landing, and called to those below to bring lights, so as not to allow a chance of escape. Of course, he had no thought of evil."

"And you connect that man with the evil?"

"I do," said Mr. Grey, as he rose to leave. "There's not a shadow of doubt on my mind that that man was the author of Mrs. Crane's death."

CHAPTER XI.

FREDERICK GREY'S "CROTCHET."

THAT a strong tide, rolling from one end of South Wennock to the other, had set in against Mr. Stephen Grey, was a fact indisputable. Immediately subsequent to the inquest on Mrs. Crane, the tide of public opinion had set in *for* him; people seemed to feel ashamed of having suspected him of so fatal an error, and they made much of Mr. Stephen Grey. This prevailed for a week or two, and then the current changed. One insinuated a doubt, another insinuated a doubt; some said Mr. Stephen had been culpably careless; others said he had been tipsy. / And the current against the surgeon went flowing on until it became as a rushing torrent, threatening to engulf him in its angry might.

Another indisputable fact was, that a great inciter to this feeling was Mr. Carlton. It was he who did the most towards fanning the flame. This was not generally known, for Mr. Carlton's work was partially effected in secret; but still it did in a

measure ooze out, especially to the Greys. That Mr. Carlton's motive must be that of increasing his own practice, was universally assumed; but it was an underhand way of doing it, and it caused young Frederick Grey to boil over with indignation.

On a sofa in the house of Mr. Stephen Grey, lay a lady with a pale face and delicate features. It was Stephen Grey's wife. She had just returned home after seven or eight months' absence at the continental spas, whither she had gone with her sister, a wealthy widow, hoping to pick up renewed health; for she, Mrs. Grey, suffered always from an affection of the spine.

Frederick was bending over her. The boy loved nothing so much on earth as his mother. He was imparting to her all the wonders, pleasant and unpleasant, that had occurred during her absence; the tragedy which had taken place in Palace Street, and its present consequences to Mr. Stephen Grey, naturally forming the principal topic. This had not been written to Mrs. Grey. "As well not disturb her with disagreeable matters," Mr. Stephen had remarked at the time. She was growing excited over the recital, and she suddenly sat up, looking her son full in the face.

"I cannot understand, Frederick. Either your papa did put the opium into the mixture——"

"Prussic acid, mamma."

"Prussic acid! What put my thoughts upon opium?—talking of a sleeping draught, I suppose. Either your papa did put the prussic acid into the mixture, or he did not——"

"Dearest mamma, do I not tell you that he did not? I watched him make it up; I watched every drop of everything he put into it. There was no more poison in that draught than there is in this glass of water at your elbow."

"My dear, I do not dispute it: I should be excessively astonished to hear that your papa had been careless enough to do such a thing. What I want to know is this—with your testimony and your Uncle John's combined, with the experience of *years* that they have had in your father, and with the acquitting verdict of the coroner's jury, why have people got up this prejudice against him?"

"Because they are fools," logically answered Frederick. "I don't suppose there are ten people in the place who would call in papa now. It does make Uncle John so mad!"

"It must give him a great deal of extra work," observed Mrs. Stephen Grey.

"He is nearly worked off his legs. Some of our patients have gone over altogether to the enemy, Carlton. It is he who is the chief instigator against papa. And he does it in such a sneaking, mean way. 'I am grieved to be called in to take

the place of Mr. Stephen Grey,' he says. 'No man can more highly respect him than I do, or deplore more deeply the lamentable mistake. I cannot but think he will be cautious for the future: still, when the lives of those dear to us, our wives and children, are at stake'——"

Mrs. Grey could not avoid an interrupting laugh, Frederick was imitating Mr. Carlton so quaintly.

"How do you know he says this to people?" she asked.

"Plenty of them could bear testimony to the fact, mamma. And it does its work all too well."

"And what is Mr. Carlton's motive?"

"To get our patients away from us, of course. Now that he has married an earl's daughter, he can't do with a small income. I wrote you word, you know, about his running away with Miss Laura Chesney. They met with a series of disasters in the flight; were pitched out of Mr. Carlton's carriage into the mud, and Miss Laura lost one of her shoes. She's Lady Laura now — and was then, for that matter, if they had but known it: it's said that Mr. Carlton did know it. They got married at Gretna Green, or some of those convenient places; and when they came back to South Wennock were re-

married again. You should have seen St. Mark's church! Crowds upon crowds pushed into it."

"And you amidst the rest, I suppose," remarked Mrs. Grey.

Frederick laughed. "Carlton was as white as a sheet, and kept looking round as if he feared some interruption. Bad men are always cowards. By the way, Lady Jane has come back to the house on the Rise."

"My boy, do you know I think you are too bitter against Mr. Carlton. It was not a right thing certainly to run away with a young lady, but that is not our affair; and it is very wrong to incite people against your papa—if he does do it; but, with all that, you are scarcely justified in calling him a bad man."

"Ah, but that's not all," said Frederick. "Mother, I hate Mr. Carlton! As to being bitter against him, I only wish I could be bitter; bitter to some purpose."

"Frederick!"

The boy half sank upon his knees to bring his face on a level with Mrs. Grey's, and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"I believe it was Mr. Carlton who put the prussic acid into the draught."

Mrs. Grey, startled to tremor, almost to anger,

frightened at the temerity of Frederick, could only stare at him.

"Look here," he continued, in some excitement. "The draught went out of our house right, I *know*, and the boy delivered it as it was sent. Why then did Mr. Carlton take hold of it when it arrived, and call out that it smelt of prussic acid? It *could not* have smelt of prussic acid then; or, if it did, some magic had been at work."

Mrs. Grey knew how fond her son was of *fancies*, but she had never seen him so terribly earnest as this. She put up her hand to stop his words.

"It is of no use, mother; I must speak. This suspicion of Mr. Carlton fell upon me that night. When we heard of the death, I and Uncle John ran down to Palace Street. Carlton was in the chamber, and he began talking of what had taken place, and of his own share in the previous events of the evening: how he had smelt the draught on its being brought in, and his coming off to ask Mr. Stephen Grey whether it was all right, and then going home and making up a draught on his own account and not getting back with it in time. He told all this readily and glibly, and Uncle John and Mr. Lycett took it in for gospel; but I did not. A feeling suddenly came over me that he was acting a part. He was too frank, too voluble; it was exactly as though he were rehearsing a tale learnt by heart;

and I declare that a conviction flashed into my mind that it was he who had done it all."

"You frighten me to faintness," gasped Mrs. Grey. "Have you reflected on what might be the awful consequences to Mr. Carlton were such an accusation to get abroad?"

"I am not going to speak of it abroad; but, mother, I must tell *you*: it has been burning my heart away since that night. I dare not breathe it to papa or to Uncle John: they would call it one of my crotchety fancies, and say I was only fit for Bedlam. But *you* know how often you have been surprised at the quickness with which I read people and their motives, and you have called it a good gift from God. That Carlton was acting a part that night, I am certain; there was truth neither in his eye nor on his lip. He saw that I doubted him, too, and wanted to get me from the chamber. Well, that was the first phase in my suspicion; and the next was his manner at the inquest. The same glib, ready tale was on his tongue; he seemed to have all the story at his fingers' ends. The coroner complimented him on the straightforward way in which he gave his evidence; but I know that I read *lies* in it from the beginning to the end."

"Answer me a question, Frederick. What has so prejudiced you against Mr. Carlton?"

"I was not previously prejudiced against him.

I declare to you, mamma, that when I entered the chamber where the poor lady lay dead, I had not, and never had had, any prejudice against Mr. Carlton. I had felt rather glad that he set up in the place, because papa and Uncle John and Whittaker were so worried with the extent of the practice. It was when he was speaking of the draught that an inward conviction stole over me that he was speaking falsely, deceitfully, and that he knew more about it than he would say."

"I should call it an inward fiddlestick, were the subject less awfully serious," reproved Mrs. Grey. "It would be better for you to bring reason and common-sense to bear upon this, Frederick, than an 'inward conviction,' vague and visionary. Was this young lady not a stranger to Mr. Carlton?"

"I expect she was. To him as well as to us."

"Very well. What motive, then, could Mr. Carlton have had to work her ill? The very worst man permitted to live on earth would not poison a fellow-creature, and a stranger, for the sake of pastime; and Mr. Carlton is an educated man, a man of a certain refinement; and, so far as I have seen—for I met him two or three times before I left home—he is a pleasant and agreeable one. Assuming, for the moment's argument, that your views were correct, what *motive* could have actuated Mr. Carlton?"

Frederick Grey leaned his head on his hand. The question was a poser; in fact, it was the precise point that had puzzled him throughout. Judith Ford, the widow Gould, Mr. Stephen himself, had all testified that the lady had come to South Wennock a stranger to Mr. Carlton as to the Greys.

"I don't deny that that's a point difficult to get over, or that the case is completely shrouded in mystery," he confessed at length. "It puzzles me so that sometimes I can't sleep, and I get thinking that I must be wronging Carlton. I ask myself what he thought to gain by it. Nothing, that I can see. Of course he now keeps up the prejudice against papa to get his patients; but he could not have entered upon it from that motive——"

"For shame, Frederick!"

"Dear mamma, I am sorry you are so vexed, and I wish I had not mentioned it at all. I tell you I have lain awake night after night, thinking it over in all its aspects, and I see that any probable accession of practice could not have been his motive, for the draught might have been made up by me or by Mr. Whittaker, for all Mr. Carlton knew; and in that case the odium could not have touched papa. I see that you are angry with me, and I only wish I could put away this suspicion of Carlton from my mind. There is one loop-hole; that the

man he saw concealed on the stairs may have been the villain, after all."

"What man? What stairs?" exclaimed Mrs. Grey, in astonishment.

"As Mr. Carlton was leaving the sick lady's room that same night, he saw—Hush! Here's papa!" cried the boy, breaking off abruptly. "Don't breathe a word of what I have been saying, there's a dear mother."

Mr. Stephen Grey came in, a gloomy cloud on his usually cheerful face. He threw himself in an armchair opposite his wife's sofa, his mood one of grievous weariness.

"Are you tired, Stephen?" she asked.

"Tired to death," he answered; "tired of it all. We shall have to make a move."

"A move!" she repeated, while Frederick turned round from the window, where he was now standing, and looked at his father.

"We must move from this place, Mary, to one where the gossip of Stephen Grey's having supplied poison in mistake for safe medicine will not have penetrated. It gets worse every day, and John's temper is tried. No wonder: he is worked like a horse. Just now he came in, jaded and tired, and found three messengers waiting to see him, ready to squabble amid themselves who should get him first. 'I am really unable to go,' he said. 'I have

been with a patient for the last seven hours, and am fit for nothing. Mr. Stephen will attend.' No, there was not one would have Mr. Stephen: their orders were, Mr. Grey or nobody. John is gone, unfit as he is: but this sort of thing cannot last."

"Of course it cannot," said Mrs. Stephen Grey. "How extraordinary it is! Why should people be prejudiced in the face of facts?"

"I had a talk with John yesterday, and broached to him what has been in my own mind for weeks. He and I must part. John must take a partner who will be more palatable to South Wennock than I now am, and I must try my fortune elsewhere. If I am ruined myself, it is of no use dragging John down with me; and, were I to stay with him, I believe the whole practice would take itself away."

Mrs. Grey's heart sank within her. Can any one wonder?—hearing that her home of years must be broken up. "Where could we go?" she cried, in agitation.

"I don't know. Perhaps London would be best. There, a person does not know his next-door neighbour, and nobody will know me as the unfortunate practitioner from South Wennock."

"It is a great misfortune to have fallen upon us!" she murmured.

"It is unmerited," returned Stephen Grey; "that's my great consolation. God knows how innocent I was in that unhappy business, and I trust He will help me to get a living elsewhere. It's possible that it may turn out for the best in the end."

"What man was it that Mr. Carlton saw on the stairs that night?" inquired Mrs. Grey, after a pause, her thoughts reverting, in spite of herself, from their own troubles. And Frederick, as he heard the question, glanced uneasily at his mother, lest she should be about to betray confidence.

"Nobody can tell. And Carlton fancied afterwards that he might have been mistaken—that the moonlight deceived him. But there's not the least doubt some one *was* there, concealing himself, and I and John have privately urged it upon the police never to cease their search after him. That man was the guilty agent."

"You think so?" cried Mrs. Stephen, after an awe-struck pause.

"I feel sure of it. No reasonable being can entertain a doubt of it. But for this mistaken idea that people have picked up—that the mistake was mine in mixing the sleeping draught—there would not be two opinions upon it in the town. The only point I cannot understand, is—

Carlton's having smelt the poison in the draught when it was delivered; but I can only come to the conclusion that Carlton was mistaken, unaccountable as it seems for him to have fancied a smell where no smell was."

"How full of mystery it all sounds!"

"The affair is a mystery altogether; it's nothing but mystery from beginning to end. Of course the conclusion drawn is—and the coroner was the first to draw it—that that man was the ill-fated young lady's husband, stolen into the house for the purpose of deliberately destroying her. If so, we may rest satisfied that it will be cleared up sometime, for murder is safe to come out, sooner or later."

As Stephen Grey concluded the last words he quitted the room. Mrs. Grey rose and approached her son.

"My dear, you hear what your papa says. How is it possible that you can suffer your suspicions to stray to any other than that concealed man?"

The boy turned, and wound his mother's arm about him as he answered, his frank, earnest eyes lifted trustingly to hers.

"I am just puzzled to death over it, mother mine. I don't feel a doubt that some wicked fellow was there; I can't doubt it; and of course

he was not there for good. Still, I cannot overget that impression of falseness made upon me by Mr. Carlton. There is such a thing as bribery, you know."

"Bribery!" repeated Mrs. Grey, not understanding his drift.

"If Carlton did not commit the ill himself, he may be keeping the counsel of that man who did. Mother dear, don't take your arm from me in anger. I *can't* drive the feeling away from me. Mr. Carlton may not have been the actual culprit; but, that he knows more of the matter than he suffers to appear, I am as certain of as that I am in life."

And Mrs. Stephen Grey shivered within her as she listened to the words, terrified for the consequences should they come to be overheard.

"Frederick, this is one of your crotchets. Be still; be still!"

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNLUCKY ENCOUNTER.

RECLINING languidly in her easy chair one bright afternoon, was Lady Jane Chesney. The reaction of the passionate excitement, arising from the blow dealt out to her so suddenly, had come, and she felt utterly weary both in mind and body. Some little bustle and talking outside was heard, as if a visitor had entered, and then the room door opened. There stood Laura Carlton.

"Well, Jane! I suppose I may dare to come in?"

"She spoke in a half laughing, half deprecating tone, and looked out daringly at Jane from her dazzling beauty. A damask colour shone in her cheek, a brilliant light in her eye. She wore a rich silk dress with brocaded flounces, and a white lace bonnet all gossamer and prettiness. Jane retained her hand as she gazed at her.

"You are happy, Laura?"

"Oh, so happy!" was the echoed answer. "But I want to be reconciled to you all. Papa is

dreadfully obstinate when he is crossed, I know that; but he need not hold out so long. And you, Jane, to have been here going on for a fortnight, and not to have taken notice of me!"

"I have been ill," said Jane.

"Oh, I daresay! I suppose the fact is, papa forbade you to call at my house, or to receive me here."

"No, he did not. But let us come to a thorough understanding at once, Laura, as you are here: it may spare trouble to both of us; perhaps some heart-burning. I must decline, myself, to visit at your house. I will receive you here with pleasure, and be happy to see you whenever you like to come: but I cannot receive Mr. Carlton."


"Why will you not visit at my house?"

"Because it is Mr. Carlton's. I would prefer not to meet him—anywhere."

Laura's resentment bubbled up. "Is your prejudice against Mr. Carlton to last for ever?"

"I cannot say. I confess that it is strong against him at present. I never liked him, Laura; and his underhand conduct with regard to you has not tended to soften the dislike. I cannot extend my hand in greeting to Mr. Carlton. It is altogether better that we should not meet. Like him, I never can."

"And never will, so long as you persist in



shutting yourself out from all intercourse with him," retorted Laura. "What! would it hurt you, Jane, to meet my husband?"

"We will drop the subject," said Jane. "To pursue it would be productive of no end. When I tell you that my own feelings (call them prejudices if you will) forbid me to see Mr. Carlton, I tell you truth. And some deference is due to the feelings of my father. I will not reproach you, Laura, for the step you took: the time has gone by for that; but you must not ask me to countenance Mr. Carlton."

"You speak of deference to papa's feelings, Jane! I don't think he showed much to yours. What a simpleton he has made of himself!"

Jane Chesney's face burnt with a sudden glow, and her drooping eyelids were not raised. The old spirit, always ready to uphold her father, whether he was right or whether he was wrong, had gone out of her crushed heart for ever.

"What sort of a woman is she?" resumed Laura.

"O, Laura, what matters it?" Jane answered in a tone that betrayed how full of pain was the subject. "He has married her, and that is enough. I cannot talk of it."

"Why did you not bring away Lucy?"

"I was not permitted to bring her."

"And do you mean to say that you shall live here, all by yourself?"

"Whom have I to live with? I may as well occupy this house as any other. My means will afford nothing better. *That* I do not repine at; it is good enough for me; and to be able to live at peace in it is a great improvement upon the embarrassment we used to undergo."

"But it is so lonely an existence for you! It seems like isolation."

Jane was silent. The sense of her lonely lot was all too present to her as her sister spoke: but she knew that she must *bear*.

"How much are you to be allowed, Jane?"

"Five hundred a year."

"Five hundred a year for the Lady Jane Chesney!" returned Laura with flashing eyes. "It is not half enough, Jane."

"It is enough for comfort. And grandeur I have done with. May I express a hope, Laura, that you find your income adequate to your expectations," she added in a spirit of kindness.

Laura's colour deepened. Laura was learning to estimate herself by her new standard, as the Earl of Oakburn's daughter; she was longing for the display and luxury that rank generally gives. But Mr. Carlton's father had not come forward with money; and they had to content themselves with what Mr. Carlton made by his profession: he had been compelled to tell his wife she must practise

economy; and every hour of the day Laura caught herself wishing for a thousand and one articles that only wealth can purchase. Her vanity had certainly not lessened with the accession to her title.

"I think it shameful of papa not to allow me an income, now that he enjoys the Chesney estates, or else present my husband with an adequate sum of ready money," exclaimed Laura, in a resentful tone. "Mr. Carlton, I am sure, feels the injustice, though he does not speak of it."

"Injustice!" interrupted Jane, with marked emphasis.

"Yes, it is unjust; shamefully unjust. What was my offence?—that I chose the husband he would have denied me. And now look at what he has done!—married a woman obnoxious to us all. If it was derogatory for Miss Laura Chesney to choose a surgeon when she had not a cross or a coin to bless herself with, I wonder what it is for the Earl of Oakburn, the peer, to lower himself to his daughter's governess?"

Jane made no reply. There was some logic in Laura's reasoning; although she appeared to ignore the fact that she owed obedience to her father, and had forfeited it.

"You were devoted to him, Jane, and how has he repaid you? Just done that which has driven you from his home. He has driven you with as little

compunction, I dare say, as he would drive a dog—Jane, be quiet; I will say what I have to say. He has got his new lady, and much value you and I are to him henceforth!”

“You are wrong, Laura,” Jane answered with emotion. “I came away with my own free will when he would have kept me. He—but I—I—cannot bear to speak of it. I do not defend his marriage; but he is not the first man who has been led away by a designing woman.”

“He is a hard man,” persisted Laura, working herself into a state of semi-fury; “he is heartless as the grave. Why else has he not forgiven Clarice?”

“Clarice! He has forgiven her.”

“Has he!” returned Laura, upon whom the words acted as a sudden check. “She is not at home. I am sure she’s not!”

Jane dropped her voice, “We cannot find Clarice, Laura.”

“Not find Clarice! What do you mean?”

“Simply what I say: we cannot find her. I sought out the situation she was at in Gloucester Terrace,—in fact, she was at two situations there, one after the other, but she did not remain long at either. She quitted the last of them a twelvemonth ago last June, and no trace of her since then can be discovered. Our only conjecture is, that she

must have gone on the Continent with some family, or elsewhere abroad. Papa has caused the lists of passports at the most frequented ports to be searched, but without success; but that we think little of, as she may have been entered as 'the governess.' In short, we have searched for her in all ways, and the police have searched; and we can hear nothing of her. The uneasiness this gives me, Laura, I cannot express to you; and papa—in spite of your opinion of his heartlessness—is as much troubled as I am."

"I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Laura, when her astonishment allowed her to speak. "Not find Clarice!"

In her eagerness she reiterated question upon question, and Jane told her all the particulars she had been able to glean. They were with difficulty received.

"Nothing at all has been heard of her since last June—that is, June twelvemonth?" repeated Laura.

"But Jane, you had letters from her subsequent to that?"

"I know I had; one: but it gave me no clue to where she was. It was the letter that came to us last New Year's day, to wish us the *bonne année*."

"That was not the last letter you had from her?"

"Yes, it was. I wrote three letters to her subse-

quent to that, the letters that I afterwards found lying at the library, unclaimed. Do you recollect my telling you of a very singular dream I had, relating to Clarice—a disagreeable dream?”

“I recollect your *not* telling me,” replied Laura. “You said you had a dream that troubled you, but you would not tell it, fearing my ridicule.”

“Yes,” said Jane: “it was in March. The dream made me very uneasy, and I wrote, as I tell you, more than once to Clarice, begging tidings of her. They were the letters I speak of. Every phase of that dream is as vivid to my mind now as it was then. There are moments when the superstition is all too strong upon me that it only shadowed forth the reality of Clarice’s fate. I seem to *know* that we shall never find her—in life.”

Laura would have liked to ridicule then. “Can’t you tell me the dream, Jane?”

“No,” shuddered Jane, “I cannot tell it. Least of all to you.”

Laura became curious. “Why least of all to me?”

“Because—because—in the same dream, mixed up with Clarice, mixed up with the horror—but, I am foolish, I think,” broke off Jane. “I shall say no more about it, Laura.”

Laura did not care. She had been in the habit of laughing at Jane’s dreams, and she would laugh

still. Jane Chesney had certainly had two or three most singular dreams, which had borne reference in a remarkable degree to subsequent realities of life. One of them had foreshadowed her mother's death, and Jane had told it before the death took place. That the events following upon and bearing out the dreams were singular coincidences, can at least be said. And yet Jane Chesney was not by nature inclined to superstition, but the dreams had, in a degree, forced it upon her. She buried the feeling within herself, as we all like to bury those feelings which touch wholly on the imagination—that inner life within the life. But of all her dreams, never had she been visited by one bearing half the vivid horror, the horror of *reality*, as did this last one relating to her sister Clarice.

"It is very deceitful of you, Jane, to persist to my face that you have not heard from Clarice since the new year," resumed Laura.

Jane raised her eyelids. "I have not heard from her since."

"Where's the use of saying it, Jane?" and Laura's voice took a peevish tone, for she had as much dislike to be kept in the dark as had her father the earl. "You know quite well that you had at least one letter subsequent to that, and a most affectionate and loving one."

Jane was surprised. "I do not know what your

head is running on, Laura, but I do know that I never had a line or syllable from Clarice subsequent to that January letter."

Laura took out her purse, a handsome portemonnaie, the gift of Mr. Carlton, and extracted from it a small piece of paper that had once formed part of a letter.

"Look there, Jane. You know Clarice's writing: is that hers or not? I put it in my purse to-day to bring to you."

"Oh yes, it is Clarice's writing," said Jane, the instant it was in her hands. It was the upper part of the first page, where the writing commenced, and was dated from London on the 28th of the previous February. It began as follows:—

"My dearest, I am about to make a proposal to you, and——"

Then the paper was torn. On the reverse side was the conclusion of the note, which had apparently been a short one.

"——without delay. Ever your own Clarice."

Jane Chesney pondered over the words, especially over the date. But she had never seen the note in her life before, and said so.

"Nonsense," said Laura. "If it was not addressed to you, Jane, to whom was it addressed? Clarice never wrote home to anybody but you since her departure."

"How did you become possessed of this?" inquired Jane.

"It came from home with my clothes."

"Impossible," said Jane. "I collected your things myself and packed them. There was no such scrap of paper, as this, amongst them."

"I tell you, Jane, it came to me in my box of clothes. Some little time ago a pair of my lace sleeves got mislaid. I was angry with my maid, and turned the drawer, where my lace things are kept, out upon the floor. In picking them up to replace, I found the paper. That it had come from home with my lace things is certain, for they were emptied straight from the trunk into that drawer. And there it must have remained since unnoticed, probably slipped under the paper laid at the bottom of the drawer."

"It appears to me inexplicable," returned Jane. "I know that I never received the note; and, as you say, Clarice wrote home only to me. But she never worded her letters in that strain: it is more as a wife would write to her husband."

"The display of affection struck me," said Laura, "I thought she had grown over-fond all on a sudden."

"Clarice has too much good sense to indulge in foolishly fond expressions," said Jane. I cannot understand this," she resumed. "It seems all on a

par with the rest, full of nothing but mystery. Will you give me this scrap of paper, Laura ?”

“You may keep it, and welcome. I hope we shall soon hear of her. It is so dreadfully inconsistent for Lady Clarice Chesney, or Lady anybody else, to be getting her living as a governess. But I suppose she cannot have heard of the change. Jane—to alter the subject—do you know that I saw papa at Pembury ?”

“No.”

“I did. I was visiting Colonel and Mrs. Marden, they are such nice people—but you know them for yourself. I was driving through the street in the pony carriage with Mrs. Marden, and we met Sir James’s mail-cart, he and papa inside it. Between astonishment and fear I was nearly frightened out of my wits. I pulled the reins and started the ponies off, and the next day we heard that papa had left again.”

“Are you going ?” asked Jane, for Laura had risen.

“I must be going now. I shall come in again soon, for I have not said half I thought to say, or remembered half the questions. Good-by, Jane ; come with me as far as the gate.”

“I don’t feel well enough to go out,” was Jane’s answer.

“Nonsense, that’s all fancy. A minute’s walk in this bright sunshine will do you good.”

Jane yielded to the persuasion. She muffled herself up and accompanied Laura to the gate. It was a balmy autumn day, the sun brilliant, and the red leaves shining in the foliage. Jane really did feel the air revive her, and she did not hasten indoors immediately.

Laura shook hands and proceeded down the road. Just after she had passed its bend, she encountered her husband. He was advancing at a quick step, swinging a cane in his hand.

"Oh, Lewis, were you coming in search of me?"

"Not I," said Mr. Carlton, laughing. "It would take I don't know what amount of moral courage to venture into the precincts of my enemy, Lady Jane. Has it been a stormy interview, Laura?"

"It has been a pleasant one. Not that Jane is a model of suavity in all things. She tells me I may go and see her whenever I please, but you are not to go, and she won't come to my house."

"Then I'd retaliate, Laura, by not going to hers."

"Oh, I don't know," was Laura's careless answer; "I should like to go to her sometimes, and I dare say she'll come round after a while. Won't you walk home with me, Lewis?"

"I cannot, my dearest. A patient is waiting for me."

"Who is it?"

"A farmer's wife: nobody you know. She is very ill."

They parted different ways. Laura went towards home, and Mr. Carlton continued his road up the Rise. As he passed the bend, he became aware that some one was advancing from an opposite direction, and recognised young Frederick Grey. And Master Frederick was in a fiery temper.

A word of explanation as to its cause is necessary. At the Michaelmas just passed, a Mr. Thrupp and his wife, people from a distance, had come to live at a small farm just beyond the Rise. A short time after taking possession, the wife was seized with illness, and Mr. Carlton was called in. The farmer knew nothing and had heard nothing of the merits of the different practitioners of the place, but Mr. Carlton lived nearest to him, and therefore he was summoned.

Mr. Carlton obeyed the call: but the case assumed an alarming aspect, and after a few days he suggested that another doctor should meet him in consultation, and mentioned Mr. John Grey. The farmer, Mr. Thrupp, went to the Greys' residence, to request Mr. John's attendance early on the following morning. Mr. John was out, but Mr. Stephen was in; and the farmer knowing nothing of the prejudice against the latter, arranged that he should go instead of his brother. Mr. Carlton was considerably surprised to meet *him*; he said

nothing in his presence, but he remained to say it after Mr. Stephen had departed. This was on the morning of the day when Lady Laura made her call upon her sister. Mr. Carlton was now on his way to the farm, unconscious that Frederick Grey, bearing down upon him, had just left it.

In point of fact, Frederick had been sent up by his father to inquire the result of certain remedies ordered at the consultation. On the boy's arrival there the farmer came out to speak with him.

"You are perhaps a relation of the Mr. Greys', sir?" said he, after replying to the inquiries of Frederick.

"I am Mr. Stephen Grey's son. Why?"

Mr. Thrupp, a simple-looking man, scratched his head.

"Then perhaps you'll be good enough to say, sir, that we'd rather the gentleman didn't come again," he resumed, bringing the words out with hesitation, for he did not much like to speak them. "It has so flustered my wife to hear that he sometimes sends out poison by mistake in his physic bottles, that his visit has done her more harm than good. She is a trifle better, and she thinks Dr. Carlton can get her round now by himself. If you'll be just good enough to say so, sir, to Mr. Stephen Grey, with our thanks for his visit of this morning."

The indignant red dyed Frederick Grey's features.



"Who in the world told you that calumny of my father?" he asked.

"No offence, sir," returned the farmer, civilly; "I'm sure I don't intend any, personally, for we know nothing but what we hear. After the gentleman had left, the other one, Dr. Carlton, asked how we could think of calling him into the house; he said it might cost us our lives some time, for he was not particular as to the making up of his medicines, and one lady had died through it. The other brother, Mr. John, was quite a reliable gentleman, he said, and it was him he had told me to call in. I asked my next door neighbour whether it was true, and he said it was true that a lady did die after taking some physic sent by him. It gave my wife such a turn, sir, that we feared she was going—and perhaps you'll please tell him, not meaning any offence, that we'd rather he didn't come again."

Frederick Grey quitted the farmer, his blood rising up against the injustice done his father, against the malice (as he regarded it) of Mr. Carlton. It was on returning from this very unsatisfactory interview, and when Master Frederick was in this very unsatisfactory temper, that the two unhappily came in contact, meeting exactly opposite the gate of Lady Jane Chesney.

Lady Jane might be called a third party at the meeting. She had taken a turn on the path after

the departure of Laura, and on nearing the gate again heard footsteps in the road, and looked out incidentally; there was Mr. Carlton close to her on the one side and Stephen Grey's son on the other. Not caring to be so much as seen by the surgeon, she stepped aside behind the hedge until he should have passed.


But they were not to pass so soon. Mr. Carlton was striding on with a half indifferent, half supercilious nod to the boy, when the latter, bold, fearless, and angry, placed himself right in his path.

"Don't brush by me so quickly, if you please, Mr. Carlton. I'll thank you to explain first what it is you have been saying at Thrupp's farm about my father."

Mr. Carlton stared at him, stared more especially at the address; and the supercilious expression deepened on his countenance.

"You are in a passion, I should think, young sir," was the answer, delivered with stinging blandness. "I and Mr. Stephen Grey can settle our own affairs without your aid."

The tone turned Frederick half mad, and he forgot his prudence. "You are a wicked, designing man," he burst forth. "You have been working in an underhand manner to drive my father from the place; not a day passes but you are secretly traducing him. Why don't you do it openly to his face, Mr. Carlton? Why do you



do it behind his back, when he can't defend himself?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Mr. Carlton. "Stand aside, and let me pass."

"You do know what I mean," retorted the boy, keeping his place before Mr. Carlton, so that the surgeon could not pass. "He met you in consultation at Thrupp's this morning, and the moment his back was turned you set on to prejudice their minds against him; saying he was in the habit of sending out poisoned medicines, and it frightened the woman so, that they will not have him again. And this has been your game for months. How dare you continue to assert that my father poisoned the draught that night, when you know he did not? When you *know* it, I say!"

Mr. Carlton lifted his cane menacingly. "But for the respect I bear your uncle, as my brother practitioner, and your father also, in spite of the error he committed, I would lay this about your shoulders, young gentleman, and teach you better manners."

Master Frederick's passion was not calmed by the threat, and it may be questioned if he even knew in that wild moment the danger of the words he was about to utter.

"You know, I say, that Mr. Stephen Grey did *not* commit the error. You know that it was *you*

who dropped the poison into the draught when you were alone with it after it was delivered. Keep your cane off me, Mr. Carlton; blows will not mend murder. If it was not you, it was that villain you saw on the stairs, and you, perhaps by bribery, undertook to keep his counsel and turn suspicion off him. You saw that I suspected you the very night it was done; you saw that I suspected you when you were giving your plausible evidence at the inquest. What the poor young lady had done to you, you best know, but I believe in my true heart, and I tell it you with God hearing me, that you were guilty either of killing her, or of screening that man who did do it. Now, go and talk about my father, Mr. Carlton."

It was only by dint of the most ingenious dodging that Frederick Grey had been able to accomplish his say, but Mr. Carlton caught him now. The cane came down on his shoulders; and Frederick, passion giving him the strength of a young lion, seized it and broke it. Mr. Carlton walked away, leaving a careless and scornful epithet behind him; and the boy leaned against the gate to recover breath and equanimity.

A tap on the shoulder, and Frederick turned. There stood Lady Jane Chesney. He raised his hat, and she could not help being struck with the

nobility of the glowing countenance, the fearless truth of the large grey eyes.

"Master Grey, do you know that I have heard every syllable you said to Mr. Carlton? Surely you do not believe in your own accusation? It must have had its rise only in the heat of passion?"

"Lady Jane—I beg your pardon—I am sorry you heard this—I hope you do not think me capable of making such an accusation *not* believing it. I do believe it; I have believed it ever since the night. Not that I have any grounds, or what might be called reason for believing it," he hastily added. "It is but an instinct within. I am sure Mr. Carlton knows in some way more about it than he will say. I think he must have been bribed by the man."

"Do you remember that — although we are at variance and I do not like him—he is my brother-in-law?"

"Yes. I am very sorry that you heard what passed," he repeated. "Perhaps, Lady Jane, you will be kind enough to let it be as though you had not heard it?"

"I will," said Lady Jane; "and in return allow me to recommend you not to give utterance to sentiments so dangerous. My opinion is that you are totally wrong in your fancy, and that prejudice against Mr. Carlton has led you into the error. It is

impossible to believe otherwise. Some men—I do not know that Mr. Carlton is one—would bring you before the law for this, and make you prove your words, or punish you if you could not. Be more discreet in future.”

“Thank you,” he answered, his sunny smile returning to him; “it is a bargain, Lady Jane. I was in a dreadful passion, there’s no denying it, and I did say more than I ought. Thank you very much.”

And replacing his hat, for he had stood bare-headed during the interview, Frederick Grey vaulted away, flinging the pieces of cane from him as he ran. Lady Jane stood looking after him.

“A noble spirit, I’m sure,” she murmured, “in spite of his hairbrained words. I wonder if Mr. Carlton will bring him to punishment for them. I should, were so unjustifiable an accusation made against me. Boys will be boys.”

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD ENEMY COME BACK AGAIN.

So Stephen Grey could not struggle with the fate which seemed to be working against him, and he quitted his home of years, and betook himself to London. John Grey found a suitable partner in Mr. Charles Lycett, the brother of the curate of St. Mark's, who was seeking a practice for himself, and Frederick Grey remained with his uncle in South Wennoek to pursue his medical studies.

Mr. John Grey's advice to his brother was :— Establish yourself *well* wherever you settle down, whether in London or elsewhere. Spend money in doing so, and the probability is that you will get it returned to you with interest; but if you begin in a little poking, niggardly way, it's ten chances to one if you ever get on." Stephen took the advice; and circumstances favoured him. At the very time of his removal to London, a physician died suddenly in Savile Row. Stephen Grey stepped in, secured the lease of the house at the cost of a trifling outlay,

and the practice came flowing in almost without exertion or solicitation on his part. Then he took his degree: and in a few months after he had quitted South Wennock, he found he was gaining a much larger income than he and his brother had counted together.

Nearly a twelvemonth elapsed subsequent to the return of Lady Jane Chesney to South Wennock, and September was come round again. The past year had brought little of event in its wake. An infant, born to Lady Laura Carlton, had died at its birth, and she was one of the gay South Wennock world again. Mr. Carlton's practice was a very good one now, for fresh people were ever coming to the new buildings springing up around South Wennock, and he was obliged to take an assistant. No further tilt at arms had occurred between him and Frederick Grey. He had, perhaps wisely, overlooked the boy's dangerous insolence; and since then they had passed each other in the street without speaking. Frederick Grey's dislike of Mr. Carlton was made a sort of joke of in the Grey family; none of them (save his mother, and she was away now) knew its origin; and South Wennock set the dislike down to Mr. Carlton's somewhat underhand conduct to Stephen Grey.

Thus nearly a twelvemonth rolled on with but little to mark it.

On the grand bed of state which Jane Chesney had lovingly chosen for her father when the newly-taken house was being furnished in Portland Place, lay Eliza, Countess of Oakburn, an infant cradled by her side. There is an old saying "After a wedding comes a burying;" but it more frequently happens that after a wedding comes a christening. Buryings, however, do follow all too surely when their turn comes, and one was not far off that house now.

There had been as little of event to mark the past twelvemonth in the Earl of Oakburn's house, as there had been in South Wennock. Lady Oakburn had made him a good wife; she had been as solicitous for his comforts as Jane could have been. She made an excellent mistress of his household, a judicious and kind step-mother to Lucy, and the little girl had learnt to love her.

But all her anxious care had not been able to keep the earl's old enemy from him—gout. He lay in the room above, suffering under an aggravated attack; an attack which threatened danger.

Two days only had the little fellow in the cradle by the countess's bed seen the light; he was the young heir to Oakburn. Lucy Chesney sat near, touching now and again the wonderful little red face as she talked to her step-mother.

"It is very good of you to let me come in, mamma. What shall his name be?" They were thinking of the christening, you see.

"Francis, of course, Lucy."

"But I have heard papa say that the heir to Oakburn should be John. It has been—oh, for ages, 'John, Earl of Oakburn.'"

"Papa shall decide, dear."

"We can't ask him to-day, he is so much worse. He——"

"Worse?" echoed the countess, in a startled tone, whilst an attendant, sitting in the room, raised her finger with a warning gesture.

Lucy coloured with contrition; she saw that she had said more than she ought.

"Nurse, you told me the earl was better this morning!"

The woman rose. "My lady, there was not much difference; he was better, if anything," she responded, endeavouring to put all evasion from her voice. "My lord is in pain, and that's why Lady Lucy may call him worse; but it is in the nature of gout to be painful."

"Lucy, tell me the truth. I ask you in your father's name. I see that he is worse, and they are keeping it from me. How much worse?"

Lucy stood in distress, not knowing what to do; blaming herself for her incaution. The eyes

of fear are quick, and Lady Oakburn saw her dilemma.

"Child," she continued, her emotion rising, "you remember the day, three months ago, when your papa was thrown from his horse in the park, and they sent on here an obscure account of the accident, so that we could not tell whether he was much or little hurt, whether he was alive or dead? Do you recollect that hour?—the dreadful suspense?—how we prayed to know the worst, rather than to be kept in it?"

"Oh, mamma," interrupted Lucy, placing her hand on her eyes, as if she would shut out some unwelcome sight, "do not talk of it. I never could bear to think of it, but that papa came home, after all, only a little bruised. That *was* suspense!"

"Lucy, dear child," you are keeping me in the same now," spoke the countess. "I cannot bear it; I can bear the certain evil, but not the suspense. Now tell me the truth."

Lucy thought she saw her way plain before her; anything was better than suspense, now that fear had been alarmed.

"I will tell you all I know, mamma. Papa is worse, but I do not think he is so much worse as to cause uneasiness. I have often known him in as much pain as this, before—before"—Lucy in her

delicacy of feeling scarcely knew how to word the phrase—"before you came here."

"Lucy, should your papa become worse, and danger supervene, you will let me know. Mind! I rely upon you. No"—for Lucy was drawing away her hand—"you cannot go until you have promised."

"I do promise, mamma," was Lucy's honest answer. And Lady Oakburn heaved a relieved sigh.

Of course the nurse had now to plot and plan to counteract this promise, and she sought Miss Snow. For Miss Snow was in the house still, Lucy's governess. Lord Oakburn had not allowed his wife to take the full charge of Lucy's education, so Miss Snow was retained: but the countess superintended all.

"My Lady Lucy must not be let know that his lordship is in danger, miss," grumbled the nurse. "She comes tattling everything to my lady, and it won't do. A pretty thing to have *her* worried!" she concluded, indignantly.

"Is the earl in danger?" quickly asked Miss Snow.

"He's in awful pain, if that's danger," was the answer. "I'm not a sick nurse, miss; only a monthly: but if ever I saw gout in the stomach, he has got it."

"Why that is certain death," uttered Miss Snow, in an accent of alarm.

"Oh, no, it's not; not always. The worst sign, they say, is that all my lord's snappishness is gone out of him!"

"Who says so? Who says it is?"

"The attendants. That black fellow does nothing but stand behind the bed and cry and sob. He'd like his master to rave at him as is customary. But you'll keep things dark from Lady Lucy, please. I'll speak to the servants."

Miss Snow nodded, and the nurse warned the rest of the house, and took her way back to Lady Oakburn's chamber.

The day closed; the night drew on, and the earl's state was an ominous one. Agonies of pain, awful pain, lasted him throughout it: and but for the well-built walls and floors, Lady Oakburn must have heard the groans.

With the morning he was calmer, easier; nevertheless, three physicians went in to him. The two in regular attendance had sent for another.

"The ship's sinking," said the earl to them. "No more splicing of the timbers; they are rotten, and won't bear it."

The earl was right, and the doctors knew it; but they would not admit to him, in so many words, that he was dying. The earl, in his blunt way, blunt still, told them of their craftiness.

"It's all in your day's work to go about deceiving

people," cried he; "telling them they are getting their sea-legs on again, while all the while you know that before the next eight bells strike they'll be gone down to Davy Jones's locker. It may be the right sort of steering for some patients, delicate women and children, perhaps, but it's not for me, and you are a long way out of your reckoning."

The earl's voice grew faint. They administered some drops in a glass, and wiped his brow.

"I am an old sailor, sirs," he continued, "and I have turned into my hammock night after night for the best part of my life, knowing there was but a plank between me and eternity. D'ye think, then, I have not *learnt* to face death—that you should be afraid to acknowledge it to me, now it's come? If I had not made up my accounts for my Maker before, there wouldn't be much time to do it now. I have been headstrong and irritable, giving my tongue the reins, but the Great Commander knows that poor Jack Tar acquires that in his hard life at sea. He looks to the heart, and He is merciful to a slip word or two. Pompey!"

The man came forward and threw himself by the bedside; his whole attitude expressing the keenest grief and love.

"Pompey, tell them, though I have made you fly at my voice, whether I have been a bad master. What sort of a master have I been?"

Poor Pompey! his wailing sobs nearly choked him as he knelt and covered the earl's hand with his tears and kisses.

"Never a better massa! never a better massa! Pompey like to go with him."

"You'd keep it from me that my voyage is run, sirs! We seamen have got a Saviour as well as you. He chose fishermen for his friends; d'ye think, then, he'd reject a poor knocked-about sailor, who goes to him with his hat in his hand and lays his sins at his feet? No! He'll steer our boat through the last quicksands, and be on shore to receive us, as he once received his own fishermen, and had a fire of coals ready for them, and fish laid thereon, and bread. And that was after he had suffered! Never you be backward again in telling a tired sailor that he's nearing the port. Shall I last the day out?"

More than that, they thought.

"One of you will send a despatch for my daughter, and—I suppose my wife cannot come to me."

The medical attendant of Lady Oakburn was in the room, one of those round the earl, and he pronounced it "Impossible." Neither must her ladyship be suffered to know of the danger, he added: for a day or two at all events it must be kept from her, or he would not answer for the consequences.

The young Lady Lucy must not be allowed to learn it, or she would carry the tidings.

The earl listened, and nodded his head. Very good, he said. And he dictated a message to his daughter Jane.

As the medical men went out they encountered Lucy. She was sitting on the stairs waiting for them, deeply anxious. The summoning of the third doctor had caused commotion in the house, and Lucy did not know what to think. Gliding up to the one who attended Lady Oakburn, whom she knew best, she eagerly questioned him. But Dr. James was upon his guard, told Lucy the pain had left her papa, and she might go in for a minute to see him.

The child delighted, went in. The earl stroked her head and kissed her; told her to take a kiss to mamma and to the "young blue-jacket," and to say that his voyage was going on to a prosperous ending. Then, remindful of what the medical men had said about its being kept from his wife, or it might cost her her life, and afraid of a slip-word on his own part, he dismissed the child, telling her he was to remain very quiet all day. Lucy flew to the countess's chamber, encountering the angry nurse at the door, who looked ready for a pitched battle.

"It's quite impossible that you can enter, my lady."

Lucy pleaded. And the nurse found that the child had only come to bring *glad* news, and to talk of the little "blue-jacket;" so she allowed her to go in.

And when Dr. James came to pay his morning visit to the countess, his answers to her inquiries were full of reassuring suavity, calculated to give ease to her mind. No idea did they impart that the earl was dying; indeed, Lady Oakburn rather gathered from them that he might be taking a renewed lease of life.

CHAPTER XIV.


GOING OUT WITH THE TIDE.

LADY JANE CHESNEY was seated at breakfast in her house at South Wennock, when a man on horseback, wearing the uniform of the telegraph office at Great Wennock, came galloping to the gate. Jane saw him hand in a despatch, and her heart fluttered strangely. Imagination took a wide range and settled upon Clarice. When Judith entered she saw that her mistress's very lips were white.

"I am afraid to open it, Judith," spoke poor Jane, as the girl held it out to her. "It may bring bad news."

"Nay, my lady, I should hope the contrary," was Judith's answer. "It's known there was a young heir expected: perhaps this is to tell that he is born."

The colour came into Jane's face again. Of course it was nothing else! How could she have been so oblivious? No, no chance of its being from the unhappy Clarice: *she* seemed lost for good. With fingers that burned—burned at the



thought of who the young heir's mother was, and who she had been,—Jane Chesney tore open the despatch,

“London. Half-past eight, A.M.

*“RICHARD JAMES, M.D., TO THE LADY JANE
CHESNEY.*

“The Earl of Oakburn is dangerously ill: come at once, if you would see him alive. He says bring Lady Laura.”

The despatch fell from her hand, and she burst into tears. All her old affection for her father had come back again in that one moment.

What was to be thought of first? Lady Jane took a minute for reflection, and then her plans were formed. She wrote a line in pencil to Laura, explaining what the matter was, and telling her she would call for her in a fly. The servant was to leave the note at Mr. Carlton's, and then go on to the Red Lion, get the fly, and come back in it. Meanwhile, Lady Jane and Judith prepared themselves, and were ready when the fly came. Jane got in, and they drove to her sister's. Mr. Carlton came forth. Jane bowed coldly, but vouchsafed to him no other greeting.

“Is Lady Laura not ready?” she asked.

“Laura is absent,” he replied. “The twisted note you sent was not sealed, and I opened it. She

is gone to spend a few days at Pembury with Colonel and Mrs. Marden."

Jane was rather at a nonplus for a moment. "This opportunity for a reconciliation with the earl should not be lost," she resumed at length. "Lady Laura must be telegraphed to." *Lady Laura!* Not to him, though he was the husband, would she speak the simple name. "I will telegraph to her myself as I pass the Great Wennock Station," continued Jane, as she gave the signal to drive on. "Good morning."

"Thank you," returned Mr. Carlton, "if you will take the trouble. Good morning, Lady Jane. I sincerely hope you will find the earl better on your arrival."

A hasty journey to the station; a hasty telegraphic message, dispatched to Lady Laura Carlton at Colonel Marden's; and Lady Jane and Judith were seated in an express train, whirling away towards London.

They reached Portland Place early in the afternoon. A change for the worse had taken place in the earl; he was rapidly sinking. Lady Jane was shown immediately to his chamber. She remembered the large handsome bed-room which had been his, and was turning to it of her own accord.

"Not there, my lady," whispered the servant; "higher up."

"*Higher up?*" repeated Jane, with displeased emphasis.

"The countess is lying in that room. My lord is up-stairs."

Jane resented the news in her heart. *He* to be put out of his room for a Miss Lethwait! The words seemed to imply that she was ill, but Jane would not inquire. In the corridor, Lucy (who in spite of Miss Snow's watchfulness had not been quite cured of her propensity for looking over balustrades) flew down to her, in delight and surprise.

"Oh, Jane!" she uttered, clinging round her neck, "is it really you? How came you to come?"

Miss Snow would have found fault with the wording of the sentence. Jane only clasped her sister.

"I have come to see papa, Lucy. Is there no hope?"

"No hope!" echoed the child, staring at her sister. "Why, Jane, whatever made you think that? He is as much better as he can be. He is nearly well. The pain is almost gone: and you know he always got well as soon as the pain left him."

Jane was staggered. The message had been ominous; the servant, now showing her up, had just told her there was no hope; what, then, did

Lucy mean ! But Dr. James was standing beside them, having emerged from the earl's room. He heard Lucy's words and saw Jane's perplexed countenance. He hastened to interfere, willing to prevent any inexpedient explanation.

"Lady Jane Chesney, I presume. But—allow me a moment, Lady Lucy: this is against orders. You were not to come to this corridor at all to-day: the earl must not be disturbed."

"Oh, Dr. James! I was obliged just to come when I saw my sister. But I'll go back to Miss Snow now. Jane, you will come into the study when you have seen papa?"

Jane promised.

"Oh, and Jane there's a new baby. Do you know it? He is such a darling little fellow, and papa calls him 'young blue-jacket.' He is three days old."

"Is there?" responded Jane, and Lucy went back again. Jane turned inquiringly to the physician.

"The earl, I grieve to say, is sinking," he whispered. "We keep the fact from the child that it may not get to the ears of the countess; she would go immediately and tell her."

"Is it right to keep it from the countess?" asked Jane, her tone, as she put the question, betraying that she thought it was wrong.

Dr. James heaved up his physicianly hands and eyes.

"Right to keep it from her, Lady Jane! I would not for the world allow it to reach her ladyship in her present state of health; we don't know what the consequences might be. My reputation is at stake, my lady."

Jane bowed her head, and entered her father's room. The earl lay with his eyes closed, breathing heavily. Death was on his face: Jane saw that at the first glance. The slight movement she made caused him to open them: a joyful ray of gladness flashed into his countenance, and he feebly put out his hand. Jane sank on her knees, and burst into a wailing flood of tears as she clasped it.

"Oh, father, father!"

Who can tell how bitter was that moment to Jane Chesney? In spite of the marriage and the new wife, in spite of the estrangement and the separation, she had unconsciously nourished a secret hope, unacknowledged to herself openly, but not the less dear to her heart, that she and her father should come together again; that she should still be his dear daughter, living in the sunshine of his presence, ministering to his comfort as of old. How it was to be brought about, she never glanced at; but the hope, the prospect, had not been less cherished. And now—there he lay, but a few hours of life left

to him! Had Jane's heart not broken before, it would have broken then.

The day drags through, though storms keep out the sun.
And thus the heart will break, but brokenly live on.

Her head was bowed over him, and she allowed a few moments for the indulgence of her anguish. Her bonnet was off, and Lord Oakburn stretched over his other hand, and laid it fondly on her hair.

"Don't fret, Jane. We must all make the port at last."

"Oh, father, father!" she repeated, in agony, "is there no hope?"

"Not in this ship, Jane. But I'm going into a better one. One not made with human hands, child; one where the pumps don't get choked or the timbers rotten. My voyage is nearly over, Jane."

She sobbed piteously; she scarcely knew how to bear the hour's trial.

"Father, are we to part *thus*, having been estranged all this while? Oh, father, forgive me for my rebellion; forgive me for all the grief I may have caused you; but I could not endure to feel nothing to you, to be a cipher in your home."

"Child, what do you mean? You have not been rebellious to me; you must go to Laura for that. It did hurt you, Jane, I know, and I was vexed

when I had done it; but you see, child, I wanted to have a direct heir, and now he is born. Forgive *me*, Jane, for the pain I caused you, but don't you ask forgiveness of me; you, my dutiful child, who have ever been ready to put your hands under my feet. I might have set about it in a more shipshape manner, have taken you into my counsels, and made it pleasant for all sides; and I wish I had. You see, I thought you wouldn't like it, and I was a coward and did not speak. She has been a good wife to me, Jane; and she respects you, and would love you, if you'd let her."

Jane did not answer. An attendant opened the door to see if anything might be wanted, but was waved away again.

"So Laura would not come, Jane?"

"She could not come," sobbed Jane; "she was at Pembury. She is telegraphed for, and may be here by the next train."

"Does he make her a good husband?"

"I think so; I hear nothing to the contrary. I do not go there," added Jane, trying to subdue her aching heart, so as to speak calmly.

"And now, Jane, where's Clarice? In this, my death-hour, she is more anxiously present to me than any of you. Has harm come to her?"

"Father, I don't know where she is: I cannot think or imagine where. I begin to fear that

harm has come to her; sometimes I feel sure of it."

"In what shape?" asked the earl.

"Nay, how can I tell? Then again, I reason that she must be abroad: but the thought of her has become to me a wearing care."

"However it may be, I can do nothing," panted the peer, "but, Jane, I leave her to you. Mind! *I leave her to you!* Spare no exertions to discover her; make it your object in life, until it is accomplished; keep that port always in view in your steering. And when you have found her give her my blessing, and tell her I have not been able to leave her well off, but that I have done what I could. You will give her a home, Jane, if she will not come to her step-mother?"

"As long as I have one, father."

"Yours is secured, such as it is. Lucy——"

The earl's voice had been growing weaker, and now ceased altogether. Jane opened the door, and beckoned in the attendants, whom she found waiting outside.

"Oh, missee! oh, missee!" wept poor Pompey, pressing forward, "massa never get up no more!"

The earl appeared to have sunk into a sort of stupor; they could scarcely tell whether it was stupor or sleep. When the medical men paid their next visit, they said he might go off in it, or might

rally from it for a time. Jane sat in the room ; she could not leave him. And thus the day passed on.

Passed on without bringing Laura. Jane wondered much. *Would* she not come—as the earl had fancied ? She listened intently, her ear being alive to every sound.

The medical men came in and out, but the dying man still lay as he was, and gave no token. Once more Jane urged upon them the claims of the countess—that she ought to be apprised of the danger ; but they positively refused to listen. It grew dark, and the nurse brought in the night-lamp. Jane was watching her arrange it, watching her mechanically, when a voice was heard from the bed.

“ Jane.”

It was her father's ; he had roused up to consciousness ; it almost seemed to strength, for the voice was firm, and the sight and sense seemed clear. Jane put a few teaspoonfuls of jelly within his lips.

“ Jane, I think I have seen the country on the other side. It's better than Canaan was, and the rivers are like crystal, and the flowers on the banks are bright. I am nearly there, Jane ; just one narrow strait to work through first, which looks dark ; but the darkness is nothing, for I can see the light beyond it.”

Jane's tears fell on the bed-clothes. She could

not trust her voice to answer: and the earl was silent for a time.

"Such a great big ship, Jane," he began again; "big enough to hold all the people in the world; and those who get into her are at rest for ever. No more cold watches to keep in the dark night; no more shifting sails; no more tacking and wearing; no more struggles with the storm and hurricane; the Great Commander does it all for us. You'll come to me there, Jane? I am but going on a short while first."

"Yes," Jane softly whispered through her sobs, "to be together in bliss for ever and ever."

"Where's Clarice?" he suddenly exclaimed. "Is she not come?"

Jane had little doubt that he meant Laura. "We did not expect Clarice," she said. "And Laura is not here yet."

"Jane, perhaps Clarice has gone into the beautiful ship before me. I may find her there."

"I don't know," Jane faintly answered, feeling how worse than unsatisfactory was the uncertainty respecting Clarice in that dying hour. "Father, if—if Laura cannot be here in time, you will leave her your forgiveness?"

"It is left to her. You may give it to her again; my love and my full forgiveness. But she might have come for it. Perhaps he would not let her, Jane."

"You forget," she murmured; "Laura was not at home, and Mr. Carlton could not prevent her. Why should he wish to do so? I do not think he would."

"Tell Laura I forgive him, too; and I hope he may get into the ship with the rest of us. But, Jane, I cannot like him; I never did. When Laura finds herself upon the quicksands, do you shelter her; she'll have nobody else to do it."

Was that sentence spoken with the strange prevision that sometimes attends the dying? Perhaps so!

A slight sound upon the muffled knocker. Jane's quick ear caught it. She hoped it was Laura, but it was only Dr. James. He came into the earl's room, and then went down to pay a visit to the countess.

After his departure Lord Oakburn again sank into what seemed a stupor, and lay so for an hour or two. As ten o'clock struck he started from it.

"Eliza, what's the time?"

Jane glanced at his watch, which was hanging up, for she had not noticed the striking of the house clock.

"Five minutes past ten."

"Oh, it's you, Jane," he said, with a sort of gladness that it *was* her, which found its echo in Jane's heart; and he feebly put out his hand in search of hers. "My own Jane! with me

at last! She doesn't know how I have missed her."

The last sentence appeared to be spoken as if he were oblivious of her presence, in that treachery of memory which frequently accompanies the dying: and there was a second glad echo within her heart.

"I am not in there yet, Jane, and the passage seems long. But there the ship is—what a sight! with her spars and her white sails. They are silvered over; and the spars are as glass, and the ship herself is gold. But it seems long to wait! How's the tide?"

His voice had grown so indistinct that Jane had to bend down to listen, but the last question was spoken in a clear and anxious tone. She gave some soothing answer, not supposing that he meant the tide of reality—the matter-of-fact "high water at London Bridge" of the living, moving world.

"The tide, Jane, the tide?" he continued, pointing with his finger to his own nautical almanac, which lay on his dressing table. Jane rose and reached the book.

"The tide is coming in, father," she said, after finding the place. "It will be high water at eleven o'clock."

"Ay, ay. That's what I am waiting for. I couldn't go against the tide, Jane; it must turn. I am going out with the tide."

Jane put the book back, and resumed her post by him.

"Give my love to my wife, Jane, and tell her I wish I could have seen her; but the doctors wouldn't let it be so. And, Jane, you'll love my little son?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, with a sobbing sigh.

"And you'll come here sometimes when I'm gone? You'll come to see Lucy."

"Oh, father!" uttered Jane, in a tone of startled pain, "you surely have not left her away from me?"

The earl half opened his eyes. "What?"

"You have not left the guardianship of Lucy to any one but *me*?" breathlessly continued Jane. "Father, I have brought her up from her cradle; I have been to her a second mother; you could not leave her away from me?"

He was evidently troubled, insensible as he had nearly become to earthly things.

"I did not think of it, Jane; when I made my will, I did not think—" his voice sunk and Jane could not catch it. Silence fell upon the room, broken only by a convulsive sort of sound that arose now and then: the sobs of Jane.

"It's getting dark," he resumed, later; "come closer to me, Jane. Don't you see the ship? She's lying at anchor while she waits. Look at her, Jane; how bright she is; never mind it's being dark here."

The banks are green, and the flowers brilliant, and the clouds are of rose colour. And there, there's the Captain! there he is! Oh, Jane, shut your eyes, you cannot look upon his brightness. He is beckoning to me; he is beckoning to me!" reiterated the earl, his earnest voice so full of strange, loving triumph, that to Jane's mind it was impossible to connect what he said with a mere worldly vision. "I told you he would not reject a poor weather-beaten sailor. He is going to guide the ship to God—right into the blessed port of Heaven. Yes, yes, I am coming; never mind the darkness; we shall soon be in the light."

He said no more, but lay quietly. The tide turned at eleven o'clock to go out, and the spirit of Francis, thirteenth Earl of Oakburn, went out with it.

One of the servants left the room to make known the event to the household below, and in the same moment Lady Laura Carlton, so anxiously looked for, arrived. It turned out that when the telegraphic despatch reached Colonel Marden's, she and the family had just departed on a day's excursion to some distant ruins. It was given to her when she returned home, but that was not until five in the evening; she had lost no time in coming then.

Laura was of an impetuous nature, and the in-

stant the door was opened to her she ran up the stairs, trusting to instinct to find her father's bedroom. In the corridor of the first floor, close to the countess's chamber, she encountered the servant who had just left the room above. "How is the earl?" she then inquired.

The servant stared at her. Perhaps the woman did not know that another daughter was expected. She made no answer for the moment, and Laura stamped her foot impatiently.

"I ask you how Lord Oakburn is! Don't you know me? I am Lady Laura Carlton."

"The earl is dead, my lady," replied the woman in a low voice. "The breath has just left his body."

"Dead!" shrieked Laura, in a tone that might be heard in every part of the house. "My father dead! Oh, Jane, is it true?" she wailed out, catching sight of Jane Chesney on the stairs above. "Jane, Jane! is papa dead?"

Out came the nurse from Lady Oakburn's room, her face as white as a sheet and as sour as a crab, praying for caution and silence. Laura went higher up, and Jane took her into the death-chamber.

She flung herself down by the side of the bed, crying frantically, almost raving. Why had she not been sent for earlier? why had they allowed him to die without her seeing him? Jane, in her quiet,

but far deeper grief, strove to soothe her; she whispered of his peaceful frame of mind, of his loving message of forgiveness; but Laura sobbed on hysterically, and would not be comforted.

A sight startled them both. A tall figure, robed in a flannel dressing-gown, with an ashy pale face, came gliding in and stood gazing at the corpse. Laura had never seen her before, and the sight hushed her to silence; Jane knew her for Lady Oakburn. The nurse followed behind, wringing her hands, and audibly lamenting what it appeared she had no power to prevent. Laura's cry in the corridor had penetrated to the chamber, and Lady Oakburn rose out of her bed to come.

Anguish and reproach struggled in her countenance; anguish at her husband's death, reproach at those who had kept his state from her; but she had powerful command over her feelings, and retained almost unnatural calmness. Seeing Jane, she turned and confronted her.

"Was this well done, Lady Jane?"

"I do not know precisely to what you allude," was Jane's answer. "I am a stranger in the house, holding no authority in it, and whether things are ill or well done, it is not I who am responsible. I would have saved my father's life with my own, had it been possible so to save it."

"You have been here with him?"

"Since this afternoon."

"And yet you have excluded me!" returned Lady Oakburn, her voice trembling with suppressed emotion. "You think it right to exclude a wife from her husband's death-bed?"

"I think it very wrong," said Lady Jane: "I think nothing can justify it, save peril to her own life. The first caution I had breathed into my ear upon entering this house was, that the truth of my father's state, his danger, must be kept from you. I ventured to remonstrate; yes, I did: once to Dr. James alone, again to the medical men in concert; and I was told that it was essential you should be kept in ignorance; that the tidings, if imparted, might have the worst effect upon you. I should have been the first to tell you, had I dared."

Lady Oakburn turned her condemning eyes on the nurse. "It was Dr. James," spoke up the woman; "he gave his orders throughout the household, and we could but obey him. He was afraid of such a thing as this, that has now happened: and who's to know, my lady, that you may not die for it?"

"I beg your pardon," murmured the countess to Jane. "Oh, Lady Jane, let us be friends in this awful moment!" she implored, an irresistible impulse prompting her to speak. "He was your father; my husband; and he is lying dead before

us ; he has entered into the world where strife must cease ; forgive me for the injury you think I did you, for the estrangement that I unhappily caused ; let us at least be friends in the present hour, though the future should bring coolness again ! ”

Jane Chesney put her hand into her step-mother's. “ It was not my fault that you were not with him ; had it rested with me, you should have been. He charged me to give you his love, and to say how he wished he could have seen you, but that the doctors forbade it. His death has been very peaceful ; full of hope of a better world ; a little while, he said, and we should all be joining him there.”

Lady Oakburn, Jane's hand still in hers, had laid her face upon the pillow by the dead, when a storm of suffocating sobs was heard behind them. Lucy, likewise aroused by Laura's cry on the stairs, had stolen in, in her night dress.

“ You kept it from me too, Lucy ! ” exclaimed Lady Oakburn, in a tone of sad reproach. “ And I *trusted* to you ! ”

“ It was kept from her,” spoke up the nurse. “ We were afraid of the child's knowing it, my lady, because she would have carried the news to you.”

“ Oh, Jane,” sobbed the little girl, “ why has your love gone from us ? You knew he was dying, and

you never told me ! you need not have begrudged a kiss to me from him for the last time."

"I have no longer authority in the house, Lucy," repeated Jane, "and can but do as I am told. I am but a stranger in it."

Her tone, broken by suffering, by sorrow, by a sound of *injury*, struck upon them all, even amidst their own grief.

Laura had been kneeling in the shade since Lady Oakburn's entrance ; had neither spoken to her, nor been seen by Lucy. Jane turned to her now.

"And he left you his forgiveness, Laura ; his full and free forgiveness, and his blessing," she said, as her silent tears dropped. "He died leaving his forgiveness to Mr. Carlton ; his good wishes for him. Oh, but that I know my father has gone to peace, to heavenly happiness, this trial would be greater than I could bear !"

The last words appeared to escape her in her excess of anguish. It was indeed a night of bitter trial for them all ; but for none perhaps as it was for Jane.

Still, in spite of her grief, she was obliged to forego a great part of her prejudice against Lady Oakburn. It was certainly not a time to retain ill-feeling ; and Jane could not close her eyes to facts—that Lady Oakburn had been a good woman in her new home. If Jane could but forgive the mar-

riage, the countess's conduct in all her new duties had been admirable: and as she sobbed that night by Jane's side, and reiterated over and over again her grief, her *remorse* for the estrangement between the earl and his daughter, her humble prayer that Lady Jane would at least *try* to learn to look upon her as not an enemy, Jane's heart insensibly warmed, and she unconsciously began to like the countess better than ever she had liked her as Miss Lethwait.

"If I have been wrong in my prejudice, more obstinate than I ought to be, if it brought pain to my dear father, may God forgive me!" she murmured. "Yes, Lady Oakburn we will be friends henceforth; good friends, I trust; never more enemies."

And Lady Oakburn took Jane's hand and sobbed over it. The trouble she had brought upon Lady Jane, the estrangement caused by her between Jane and her father, had been the one thorn in the countess's wedded life.

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEXT DAY.

On the morning following the death, Judith went abroad to make certain purchases for her mistress, and in passing along Piccadilly she encountered Stephen Grey—now Dr. Grey, as you have heard. The two stopped, mutually surprised and delighted: it is so pleasant to meet an old face from one's native place, no matter what the social degree.

"Why, Judith," he exclaimed, "is it you or your ghost? What wind blew you to town?"

He put out his hand to shake hands with her: he was the same Stephen Grey as ever, free and cordial. Judith's face glowed with pleasure: if there was one person in all South Wennock who believed in Mr. Stephen Grey's innocence, and that he was an ill-used man, it was Judith Ford.

"Lady Jane was telegraphed for yesterday, sir," she explained. "The earl was dying. We got to London in the afternoon, and he died a few minutes past eleven at night."

"I heard of his death this morning. Gout, I suppose?"

"Gout in the stomach, I believe, sir," replied Judith. "But he suffered as good as nothing yesterday, sir, and died peacefully as a child."

"He would not suffer much towards the last," remarked the doctor. "And the young earl is a strapping shaver of four days old! Death and birth, Judith; the one comes to replace the other."

"It's in the course of nature that it should be so, sir," was the answering remark of Judith. "But as to the baby being strapping, I don't know about that, for I have not seen him. It's born healthy and straight, the servants say, and that's the chief thing. Lady Laura is up in Portland Place also," she added, "but she did not get there in time to see her father alive."

"How was that—if Lady Jane could do it?"

"Lady Laura was out, visiting at Pembury. My lady sent a note to her, thinking she was at home, and we called for her in the fly as we were going to the station. Mr. Carlton came out to Lady Jane; I don't fancy she much liked meeting him; she has never once met him face to face, sir, until yesterday, since the marriage."

"How is Carlton getting on?" asked the doctor.

"Well, I hear."

"Very well, I believe," answered Judith. "But Mr. Grey and his partner, Mr. Lycett, have as much as ever they can do. There's plenty of practice for all, sir."

"I always said there was," replied the doctor. "Do Carlton and Frederick fall out still?" And he laughed as he asked the question.

"Not that I hear of, sir. I fancy they keep apart, for there's no love lost between them. He gets so good-looking, does Master Frederick: the last time I saw him he said he should soon be leaving for London."

"Very soon now. But we thought it better he should remain for a time at South Wennock, where he gets more of the drudgery of the profession than he would with me."

"And, sir, if I may make bold to ask it, how are you prospering?"

"Famously, Judith. Short as the time is that I have been here, I am making a great deal more than I did at South Wennock. So if your friend, Carlton, thought to ruin me by driving me away, he has not succeeded in his wish."

The doctor spoke in a light, pleasant tone. He cherished enmity to none, not even to Mr. Carlton; to do so was not in his nature. But Judith resented the words.

"Mr. Carlton is no friend of mine, sir; I don't

like him well enough. When shall you be paying a visit to South Wennock, Mr. Stephen ?”

“ My goodness, Judith ! The idea of your calling me ‘ Mr. Stephen ! ’ ” returned the jesting doctor. “ I’m a great man now, and shall enter an action against you for defamation of title. Don’t you know I am the famed Dr. Grey ? ”

Judith smiled. His merriment was contagious. “ But when shall you be coming, sir ? ”

“ Perhaps never,” he replied, a shade of seriousness arising to his face. “ South Wennock did not treat me so well that I should wish to see it speedily. Should the mystery ever be cleared up about that poisoned draught—and, mark you, Judith, when it is cleared up, it will be found that I was innocent—then I may visit it again.”

Judith fell into momentary thought, wondering whether the mystery ever would be cleared up. She hoped it would be sometime ; and yet—she dreaded that that time should come.

“ You will look in upon us, won’t you, Judith, now you are in town ? Mrs. Stephen Grey will be glad to see an old face.”

“ Thank you sir,” replied Judith, much gratified at the invitation. “ I shall be glad to pay my duty to Mrs. Grey. Does London agree with her, sir ? ”

“ I’m afraid it does not, Judith, very well. But neither did South Wennock. She is always deli-

cate you know, let her be where she will. Ah, Judith, if we could but find some Utopia of a spot in this lower world, warranted to give health to all invalids, what a thing it would be! As great a boon as the mill we are always looking for that grinds folks young again."

He was turning away laughing. Judith stopped him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I do not know your address."

"Bless me, don't you! I thought all the world knew where the great Dr. Grey lived," he returned in his jesting way. "There it is"—giving her his card—"Savile Row; and mind you find your way to it."

Curious to say, that accidental interview, that simple giving of the card to Judith, led to an event quite unlooked for.

When Judith reached home—that is, her temporary home for the time being, Portland Place—she found the house in a sort of commotion, although it was the house of the dead. Lady Oakburn had dismissed her medical attendant, Dr. James.

She had done it, as she did most things, in a quiet lady-like manner, but one entirely firm and uncompromising. Dr. James had by stratagem, *by untruth*, prevented a last interview between her and her husband, and she felt that she could not regard

him again with feelings unallied to vexation and anger : it was better therefore that they should part. Dr. James urged that what he had done, he had done for the best, out of concern for her ladyship's welfare. That, her ladyship did not doubt, she answered ; but she could not forget or forgive the way in which it had been accomplished : in her judgment, Dr. James should have imparted to her the truth of her husband's state, and *then* urged prudence upon her. It was the deceit she could not forgive, or—in short—countenance.

The result was the dismissal of Dr. James, and the dismay of the nurse in attendance upon the countess. The dismay extended itself to Lady Jane. Although the imprudence of Lady Oakburn on the previous night appeared not to have materially affected her, still she was not yet in a sufficiently convalescent state to be left without a medical attendant. Lady Oakburn appeared to think she was : she was not personally acquainted with any other doctor in London, she said to Jane, and seemed to dislike the idea of a stranger's being called to her of whose manners and skill she could know nothing. It was in this dilemma that Judith found the house on her return.

" Oh, my lady," she exclaimed to her mistress on the spur of the moment, " if the countess would but

call in Mr. Stephen Grey! He is so sure! he is so skilful! and she could not fail to like him."

She extended the card as she spoke, and told of the recent interview. Jane listened, and carried the card to the countess.

"Let me send for him, Lady Oakburn," she urged. "I do think it is necessary that you should have some one; and, as Judith says, you could not fail to like Dr. Grey."


Lady Oakburn consented. Known well to Judith, partially to Lady Jane, he would not seem like a stranger: and Stephen Grey was sent for. It was the first step in the friendship that ensued between the Greys and Lady Oakburn: a friendship that was destined to bring great events in its train.

It was a somewhat singular coincidence that the Dowager Countess of Oakburn should die the day subsequent to the earl. Such was the fact. She had been ill for several weeks; no immediate danger was apprehended, but in the very hour that she heard news of the earl's death—the tidings of which were conveyed to her in the morning—she was taken suddenly worse, and expired at three o'clock in the afternoon. Lady Jane went to her house at Kensington and was in time to see her alive, but she had then lost consciousness, and was speechless. One of the old countess's grand-daughters said—it was a dreadfully irreverent thing

to say—that they must have gone together to plague each other on the journey, just as they had plagued each other in life.

It was decided that the two funerals should take place at the same time and spot in one of the great London cemeteries. The burial place of the Earls of Oakburn was Chesney Oaks; but he, the old sailor just gone, had expressly desired that no parade and no expense, beyond what was absolutely necessary, should be wasted upon him. The conveying him to Chesney Oaks would involve a considerable outlay; his poor worthless body would not rest any the better for it, he quaintly said; let it be put into the ground in the simplest manner possible, and in the nearest burial-place. The executors of the countess dowager thought it well to observe the same private simplicity with regard to her, and it was arranged that they should be interred together.

Jane and Laura remained in town until the funeral should be over. They would not quit the house while their father lay dead in it; and in the new reconciliation with his widow, there was no necessity for their hurrying away. Laura, impetuous in all her doings, took a violent fancy to the countess, protesting secretly to Jane that she was a far superior woman to what she had imagined; and it would be a convenient house to stay at, she candidly added, when she chose to visit London. Jane was not



swayed by any motives so interested ; but she could not help acknowledging to herself that the countess won upon her regard day by day.

"She has done her duty by Lucy," Miss Snow remarked to Lady Jane confidentially. "Ah, never a mother was more anxious for a child's welfare than Lady Oakburn is for Lucy's. I made my mind up at first not to stop ; but when I found how good she was, how she tried to do her utmost for us all in loving-kindness, I thought I should be foolish to leave. She would not have kept me, though, but for the earl ; she told me she should wish to take the child's education entirely into her own hands, but he would not suffer it. I daresay she will take it now."

They were busy getting their mourning. Jane ordered hers neat and good, entirely befitting a lady, but plain ; Laura chose hers for its magnificence. Jane ventured to give her a caution against the expense, and Laura tossed her head in answer.

"Papa is sure to have remembered me," she said, "and surely I may spend what is my own." And she actually appealed to the countess—was it not certain that the earl had left her her share of money ?

It was a curious question to put, and perhaps the very fact of asking it proved that Laura was not quite so sure upon the point as she wished to be.

Lady Oakburn, however, could tell her nothing. She did not know how the earl had left his affairs. That, he had made a recent will, she believed ; for in the prospect of a little child's being born, he had remarked to her that he must settle his affairs in accordance with the prospect, and she thought he had done so ; but she did not know any details, for the earl had not mentioned them to her.

Oh, it was sure to be all right, Laura remarked with customary unconcern ; and she bought every pretty black dress that attracted her eye.

" You will be godmother to the little baby, Lady Jane, when the time comes for christening him ? " supplicated the countess with sensible hesitation. " He shall belong as much to you as to me."

" Yes, willingly," replied Jane. *She* did not hesitate ; that little frail being in its sheltering cradle seemed to be the one link to life left by her father.

" And—if I may express a wish—will you not call him Francis ? "

" Francis, certainly ; Francis always. The Earls of Oakburn have mostly been John—but I don't know that it need be a rule for us. We can name him Francis John ; but he must be called Francis."

On one of the days that intervened between the death and the burial, Jane borrowed the countess's carriage—her own but one short year before—and

went to Gloucester terrace. Though feeling a conviction that Mrs. West would have sent to her had she heard news of Clarice, it did not seem right to Jane's anxious mind that she should leave London again without personally inquiring. But when she reached the house she received a disappointment; Mrs. West and her children, she was told, were at the sea-side.

As Jane stood in the door-way in hesitation—as is the manner of many when they meet with an unexpected check—a gentleman put his head out at one of the sitting-rooms, wondering perhaps who might be the visitor, and what the colloquy was about. He was a pleasant-looking man, short and stout, with a red face and bristling hair.

"It's a good six weeks before my mistress will be at home, ma'am," the servant was saying. "She only went ten days ago, and—but here's master," she broke off, as the gentleman came forward. "Perhaps he can tell more certain nor me."

Mr. West advanced to Lady Jane. His wife, Mrs. West, was out of town, he observed. Could he answer any questions for her, or convey to her any message?—he should be joining her at Ramsgate on the morrow.

Jane stepped into the sitting-room. He would probably know as much as his wife, was the reflection that crossed her mind. She mentioned the

errand that she had come upon, and that she had been there some fifteen months previously on the same.

"Oh yes, yes," said Mr. West. "I remember my wife spoke of the circumstance to me—Lady Jane Chesney, I presume," he added with a bow. "I am sorry to say that we have never heard anything of Miss Beauchamp. Only a short while before my wife left home for Ramsgate, she was talking of Miss Beauchamp and wondering whether her friends had found her."

Jane sighed heavily, although she had expected nothing else but the disappointment. "No," she said, in a low tone, "we have not found her; we have not heard of her."

"It is very extraordinary," exclaimed Mr. West.

"It is more than that," said Jane, "it is alarming. Until lately we cherished the hope that she had gone abroad with some family, but every month that glides on seems to set the hope more and more at nought. Thank you," she added, moving to the door, and handing him a card. "That is my address in the country, where I reside. Should Mrs. West ever hear of her—though indeed the suggestion sounds a forlorn one—perhaps she will kindly forward me word of it there."

"I am sure you may rely upon her doing so," returned Mr. West. "And I only wish I had been

able to give your ladyship better news now," he heartily concluded.

Attending her outside, he stood on the pavement while she stepped into the carriage, and was driven away. Jane sat in it strangely disheartened, considering that she had expected no better. A conviction had latterly been gaining upon her that Clarice was dead, and she seemed only to be able to think of her as such.

But now there was one little item of news regarding Miss Beauchamp that Mrs. West had learnt since she last saw Lady Jane, and which she would certainly have imparted to her had she been at home, though she had not deemed it of sufficient importance to write to her ; and perhaps had also abstained from doing it lest she might make mischief. Mr. West knew it, but he never supposed that it was not known to Lady Jane. After all, it was not much ; and would have left the affair in at least equal mystery to that which at present enshrouded it.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN IMPROMPTU VISIT.

LADY OAKBURN sat in her chamber, in an easy chair by the fire. She sat up for several hours a day now, although the nurse with her old-fashioned ideas protested it was "too soon." Only Laura was with her, and she, Laura, held the little baby on her lap. Quite a mark of condescension for Laura, who was not fond of bringing herself into contact with things so troublesome as babies.

"I wish my own had lived," she was saying to Lady Oakburn. "It was the sweetest little girl ever seen. But I should not have nursed it, you know; I could not have subjected myself to the tie. I cannot think how you can have undertaken such a task!—you'll never be able to go out."

Lady Oakburn smiled. She and Laura were very different. "How long did your child live?" she inquired.

"Only a day and a half. Mr. Carlton saw from the first that it would not live; but he did not tell

me, and I wondered why he had it baptised so quickly. When he asked me what the name should be, and said Mr. Lycett was down-stairs and would baptise it, I inquired why he wanted it done, and he said carelessly it was as well, when infants were delicate. I thought nothing of the answer then, but he has told me since!"

"What did you name it?"

"Laura. Mr. Carlton wished it, and I like the name very well. What is Jane sitting in that strange manner for? Like a statue!"

For Jane Chesney had now returned from the visit to Mrs. West, had made her way wearily up the stairs to the countess's bed-room, and sunk down on a chair near the door. Disappointment was pressing heavily on her heart. As Laura turned to her in her wonder, Jane rose and came forward.

"I have had so fruitless a journey," she said. "Mrs. West, the lady I went to call on, was at Ramsgate, but I saw her husband. They have heard nothing whatever of Clarice. I am sure she will never be found now."

"I should turn the world topsy-turvy but what I'd find her," cried impetuous Laura. "She *can't* be lost, you know! Such a thing could not happen in these days."

Jane shook her head in silence. All the likely

places she and her father could think of had been turned "topsy-turvy" in one sense, in the past days : but they had not found Clarice.

"I am sure it was quite a weight upon papa's mind at the last," murmured Jane. "Did he talk much of her?" she continued, lifting her eyes to Lady Oakburn.

The countess replied almost eagerly. That some mystery was attaching to one of the earl's daughters she knew; for in the time of her residence in the house as governess, chance words relating to the Lady Clarice had been dropped in her hearing. But she had heard nothing further. After her marriage she inquired about her of the earl, but he had passed the question over lightly, as if not caring to speak of the subject. This she now told Jane.

"But—do you mean to say, Lady Oakburn, that papa did not acquaint you with the particulars?" asked Jane, in some surprise.

"He never did. I am sure he did not like to speak of the subject."

"I wonder that he did not," said Jane.

"I don't wonder at it at all," dissented Laura. I don't like to speak of it. Would you believe, Lady Oakburn, that I have never once spoken of it to my husband? He has not the least idea that we ever had another sister."

"But why do you not speak of it to him?" returned Lady Oakburn.

"I don't know," mused Laura. "I cannot bear to speak of Clarice to any one. It does not sound nice to confess to a sister who went out as a governess in disobedience, and does not come home again. I say I can't explain the feeling, but there it is within me, very strong. I dare say papa felt the same; we were much alike, he and I. It will be time enough to tell my husband about Clarice when she is found."

"Did she go in disobedience?" asked Lady Oakburn.

"Yes," said Laura. "It was very wilful of her. I don't mind talking of it to you, Lady Oakburn, as you know something of it, and we are upon the subject. For a long, long while papa would not so much as allow her name to be mentioned in the house. By the way, Jane," she continued, "do you know a thought has struck me more than once—you remember that scrap of a letter that I brought to you when you first came back to South Wenlock?"

"Do I remember it!" repeated Jane. "I am looking at it often. It puzzles me more than I care to say."

"Well, what has struck me is, that perhaps—it is just possible—papa in his anger opened that letter,

although it was addressed to you, and tore it up as soon as opened."

"No," said Jane. "So unable was I to find any solution of the matter, that I, like you, fancied it possible papa had opened it, and I wrote to him from South Wrenock and put the question."


"And he said he had not?"

"He wrote to me by return of post. He had never seen or heard of any such letter."

"Then I think I remember the circumstance—that is, your letter coming to him," interposed the countess, looking at Jane. "He was reading a letter from you one morning at breakfast, when he grew a little excited, a little angry, and called out he should like to know what Jane could mean. Lucy asked what it was, and he answered that Jane had been writing to know if he had opened one of Clarice's letters: as if he *would* have opened anything from her at that time, he added: he would not have touched one with the end of his stick. I recollect the words quite well," continued Lady Oakburn. "And I know I longed to inquire what the trouble was, regarding Lady Clarice, but I did not like to."

Jane sighed. "I feel—I begin to feel that we shall never find Clarice."

"Then that's nonsense," returned Laura. "She is sure to be found, dead or alive."



"Dead or alive," repeated Jane, in a low tone.
"Yes, perhaps she will. But it will not be alive."

Laura liked the sunny points of life better than the shady ones, and rarely took a dark view of anything. These unpleasant forebodings sounded as "nonsense" in her ears. Jane turned to Lady Oakburn and related to her the whole history of Clarice from beginning to end. It impressed Lady Oakburn very greatly; she thought she had never heard of anything so singular as this prolonged disappearance.

In telling the story, Jane made a passing allusion to the dream relating to Clarice, which had so disturbed her. Laura, who was putting the sleeping baby then into his little cot, interrupted her with a ridiculing word.

"Dreams, indeed! One would suppose you were some old nurse, Jane! How you can dwell upon that absurdity still, and repeat it, I cannot understand. Lady Oakburn is staring at you—and well she may!"

"At any rate we have never heard of Clarice since that dream," was Jane's answer; and her low, earnest voice told how much the subject affected her. "When Clarice shall be restored to us, safe and well, *then* I will forget my dream."

Laura threw up her supercilious head, and turned her back on Jane. "I must put my things on,"

she remarked to the countess ; “ your servants and horses will think I am not coming. I sent orders down that they should wait when they brought back Jane.”


Jane had seen the look of surprise on Lady Oakburn’s face, and spoke as Laura left the room. “ I ought to tell you, Lady Oakburn, as a sort of answer to Laura’s ridicule, that in the course of my past life three or four most singular dreams have visited me. They have borne a strange coincidence—to say the least of it—with speedily following events. I am not by nature superstitious ; I believe that I was born the reverse of it ; but it is impossible but these dreams should have fixed themselves on my mind, as something neither to be accounted for nor understood.”

“ And you had one of these singular dreams relating to Lady Clarice ? ”

“ I had. She was not Lady Clarice then. It was a very dreadful dream, and it appeared to shadow forth her death. Hour by hour, day by day, the dream, taken in conjunction with Clarice’s prolonged disappearance, becomes more vivid to my memory. *I cannot forget it.*”

“ What was it ? ” asked Lady Oakburn.

“ I would prefer not to tell it you,” replied Jane. “ Sometimes I think that if I related it to Laura she would ridicule it less.”



"You have not related it to her?"


"No. To her, of all others, my tongue is tied."

"But why to her in particular, Lady Jane?"

"Well, the cause is—but it sounds foolish even in my own ears when spoken of, so what must it to a listener? The fact is—and a very curious fact it is, one which I cannot understand—that in this dream Mr. Carlton, Laura's present husband, was most unpleasantly prominent. The details I say I cannot give you, but I dreamt Clarice was dead—I dreamt that she appeared to me dead, and that she indicated Mr. Carlton as being the cause of her death, or in some manner aiding in it."

The countess's mind was entirely free from superstition, and in a silent, inwardly polite manner she had been wondering at Lady Jane. But the awe on the latter's countenance, the hushed voice, the *solemnity* in Jane's words, served to impart its own impression to her, and she felt inclined to have a fit of the shivers.

"He was not Laura's husband then, but I was in the habit of seeing him daily, for he was my father's medical attendant; and I argue with myself that that fact, the seeing him so frequently, caused him to be mixed up in the dream. I argue that it must have been a purely accidental coincidence; but in spite of this, in spite of myself, my reason, my judgment, I cannot get that sight of Mr. Carlton, as



I saw him in the dream, from my mind ; and ever since that moment I have felt a sort of horror of Mr. Carlton. I cannot expect you, Lady Oakburn, to excuse this, or to understand it ; I feel myself that it is very wrong."

"But did Mr. Carlton know your sister Clarice ?" demanded the countess, growing strangely interested.

"Certainly not. And therefore my reason and good sense stand in condemnation against me, while the feeling, the horror, remains. I did once mention this to Laura—that Mr. Carlton was mixed up most unpleasantly in the dream, and that I could not help regarding him with a sort of shrinking dread ; but I fancy she has forgotten it. It was before her marriage. At any rate, what with this, and what with Laura's general ridicule of such things, I never care to allude to the dream in her presence. I never should allude to it but as an explanation of the cause why I grew uneasy and wrote to Clarice those letters, which have never been answered."

"Won't you relate to me the dream ?" asked the countess, in her interest. "I confess I am no believer in the theory some entertain, that dreams are sent as warnings ; I fear I ridicule them as heartily as Lady Laura ; but I should like to hear this one."

Jane shook her head. "I have never told it to any one. Pardon me, Lady Oakburn, if I still

decline to repeat it to you. Independent of my own unconquerable repugnance, I do not think it would be fair to Mr. Carlton."

Lady Oakburn could 'not forbear a smile, and Jane saw it.

"Yes," she said in answer, "I know how foolish all this must seem to you. It is foolish; and I should be thankful if I could overget the prejudice it has given me against Mr. Carlton. That prejudice is the most foolish of all. I feel how unjustifiable it is, and yet——"

Another dreamer interrupted them: the infant peer in his cradle. He raised his voice with all the power of his little lungs, and Jane hastened to take him up and carry him to the countess.

Laura meanwhile, in Lady Oakburn's carriage, was being rattled over the stones of London. The carriage took its way to the East-end, to a populous but certainly not fashionable locality. She was about to pay an impromptu visit to her husband's father, Mr. Carlton.

In a crowded and remote thoroughfare, where riches and poverty, bustle and idleness, industry and guilt, seemed to mingle incongruously together, was situated the residence of Mr. Carlton. The carriage drew up before a square red brick house; not large, but sufficiently commodious. It stood a little back from the street, and a paved court led to

the entrance. On the door was a brass plate, "Mr. Carlton, Surgeon;" and over the door was a large lamp of flaring yellow and red glass.

Laura stepped out of the carriage, and a manservant opened the door almost the instant that she had rung at it.

"Can I see Mr. Carlton?"

"Not now, ma'am. It is not my master's hour for receiving patients. In a minute he will have left on his round of visits."

The servant by a slight gesture indicated a plain-looking brougham in waiting. Laura had not noticed it. The refusal did not please her, and she put on her most imperious manner.

"Your master *is* at home?"

"He is at home, ma'am, but I cannot admit you. It is the hour for his carriage, and—and there he is going to it," added the servant, a sort of relief in his tone, for he did not like controversy.

Laura turned quickly; a thin man of sixty had come out of a side door, and was crossing the paved court. She stepped up and confronted him.

"Mr. Carlton, I presume?"

She need not have asked. In the slender, spare, gentlemanlike form, in the well-shaped features, in the impassive expression of face, she saw her husband over again: her husband as he would be when thirty more years should have passed over his head

—if they were destined to pass. In the elder man's sharp tone, his decisive gesture as he turned and answered to the call, she recognised the very manner of him so familiar to her. The tone and manner were not discourteous certainly, but short and very uncompromising.

"I am Mr. Carlton. What is your business?"

"I have come to see you, sir. I have come all the way from the West-end to see you."

Mr. Carlton glanced at the carriage. He saw the earl's coronet on it; he saw the servants in their handsome livery—for the mourning was not assumed yet for the earl. But Mr. Carlton did not entertain any overdue reverence for earls on the whole, and carriages and servants he only regarded as necessary appendages to comfort to those who could afford them.

"Then I'm very sorry you should have come at this hour, young lady, that's all," he said. "I cannot see patients at home after the clock strikes three: and it struck two minutes ago; you might have heard it from yonder church. Were I to break the rule once, I might be wanted to break it always. If you will come to-morrow at——"

"I am not a patient," interrupted Laura.

"Not a patient? What are you, then?"

"I am your son's wife, sir: Lady Laura Carlton." Mr. Carlton betrayed no surprise. He looked at

her for a minute or two, his impassive face never changing. Then he held out his arm with civility, and led her to the house. The entrance at the forbidden hour which he would have denied to a patient, however valuable, he accorded to his daughter-in-law.


He handed her into a room on the ground floor, a dining-room evidently ; a dark sombre apartment; with heavy crimson velvet curtains, and handsome furniture as sombre as the room. The man-servant was removing the remains of some meal from the table, luncheon or dinner ; but his master stopped him with a motion of the hand.

"Lay it again, Gervase."

"Not for me," interposed Laura, as she sat down in an arm-chair. "I would prefer not to take anything," she added, to Mr. Carlton.

Gervase went away with his tray. And Mr. Carlton turned to her. "And so you are the young lady my son has married ! I wish you health and happiness !"

"You are very kind," said Laura, beginning to take a dislike to Mr. Carlton. She knew how useful some of his hoarded gains would be to them ; she hated him for his stinginess in not having helped his son : and she had come down in an impulse that morning to pay him court and make friends with him. But there was something in his



calm eye and calm bearing that told her her object would be lost, if that object was the getting him to aid their pockets; and Laura entrenched herself within her own pride, and set herself to dislike him—as she always did dislike anybody who thwarted her.

“I am in London for a few days, Mr. Carlton, and I thought I would come and make your acquaintance before I left it. I did not know it would be disagreeable to you.”

“It is not disagreeable to me. I am pleased to see you here. Is Lewis in town with you?”

“As if he would not have come to you if he had been!” retorted Laura. “I was summoned to town on grievous business,” she continued, her eye and voice alike softening. “My father was dying. I did not get up in time to see him alive.”

“Your father? I beg your pardon, I forget who——”

“The Earl of Oakburn,” imperiously answered Laura, feeling excessively offended, and scarcely believing in the forgetfulness.

“The Earl of Oakburn: true. When I read of his death I felt sure that I ought to remember that name by some particular cause, but I forgot that he was the father of my son’s wife. You look angry, my dear; but if you had the work on your

hands that I have, you would not wonder at my forgetting things. I and Lewis had but scant correspondence on the subject of his marriage, and I am not sure that your father's name was mentioned in it more than once. Your own name is Laura."

"I am Lady Laura," was the answer, given with a flash of impetuosity.

"And a very pretty name it is! Laura! I had a little sister of that name once, who died. Dear me, it seems ages and ages ago to look back upon! And how is Lewis getting on in South Wennock? He ought to be a skilful practitioner by this time; he has the mettle in him if he chooses to put it out."

"He gets on as well as a doctor can do who has his way to make unassisted," returned Laura. "Nobody helps him. He ought to keep a close carriage, but he can't afford it."

If he had afforded it, his wife would have appropriated it to her own use. Driving down in that coroneted carriage with all the signs of rank and wealth about it, was just the pastime acceptable to Laura in her vanity.

"Ah, Lewis must be content to wait for that," remarked Mr. Carlton. "I did not keep a close carriage until I had been more years in practice than Lewis has. Tell him from me, my dear,

that those who know how to win, generally know how to wait."

"I'll not tell him," said Laura, boldly. "I think, sir, you ought to help him."

"Do you, young lady? What does he get by his practice? Six or seven hundred a year?"

"Well, yes; I think he gets that."

"It's more than I got at his age. *And I would recommend him to make it suffice.*"

The peculiar emphasis which accompanied the words, told a tale to Laura: that no help must be expected from Mr. Carlton. Laura threw back her head disdainfully. Only asking it for the sake of him whom she so loved, really careless of money herself, she felt anger rather than disappointment. She rose to leave.

"Your husband knows my disposition, Lady Laura: that I never can be badgered into anything—and you must pardon the word. Tell him I have not altered my will; I shall not alter it if he keeps in my good books; but he must look to his own exertions while I live, not to me."

"I think you are a very unkind father, Mr. Carlton."

"My dear, you can think so if you please," was the equable answer, given in all courtesy. "You don't know your husband's disposition yet. Shall I tell you what he is? He makes, you say, six or

seven hundred a year. If I allowed him, from to-day, six or seven hundred on to it, making twelve or fourteen, by the year's end he would find that too little, and ask for fourteen hundred more. Lewis is safe to spend all his income, no matter from what sources it may be derived; and I don't care to have my hard-earned money wasted in my lifetime."

Laura drew her black lace shawl round her with supercilious meaning, and swept from the room, deaf to offers of wine and other good things. Mr. Carlton followed, and held out his arm. Had it been anyone but her husband's father she would have refused it.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"In the house with my dead father," passionately answered Laura. "I should not have quitted it on any errand but this."

"I have been glad to see you, my dear. I shall always be glad to see you and Lewis. Come and stay with me, both of you, at any time. Should business or pleasure bring you to London, Lady Laura, and you can reconcile yourself to this end of the town, make my house your home. You shall be heartily welcome."

He led her out with quite an excess of stately courtesy, bowed her into the waiting carriage, lifted his hat, and stood bareheaded until she had driven away.

"He is a gentleman in manners, with all his meanness," quoth Laura to herself. "Somehow I had feared he might not be. And I can understand now why he and Lewis have been so antagonistic—they are too much like each other."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FACE AGAIN!

IT was the day of the funeral of the Earl of Oakburn. In her dressing-room sat his widow, wearing her deep mourning robes and her white cap, the insignia of her bereft condition. Near to her, in robes of mourning as deep, sat the earl's daughters, Jane, Laura, and Lucy. Lucy the child cried incessantly; Laura ever and anon gave vent to a frantic burst; Jane was tranquil. Tranquil outwardly; and none, save perhaps the countess, suspected the real inward suffering. What with the loss of him, gone from their sight in this world for ever, and the loss of one they knew not how gone, Jane Chesney's grief was too bitterly acute for outward signs; it lay deeper than the surface.

The Earl of Oakburn and the dowager countess were left in graves side by side each other in the large cemetery; and the solicitor to the Oakburn family was coming in with the wills. A copy of that made by the countess was to be read, because it was known that legacies were left to some of

those ladies sitting there. The lawyer, Mr. Mole, was a thin man with a white shirt-frill, who surreptitiously took snuff every three minutes from under his handkerchief.


He solaced himself with a good pinch outside the dressing-room door, and went in bowing, two parchments in his hand. Lady Oakburn was not strong enough to get to the apartments below, and the lawyer was received here, as had been arranged. The will of the earl was the one he retained in his hand to read first. He took his seat and opened it.

Lord Oakburn had it not in his power to bequeath much. The estate was charged with the payment of five hundred a year to his eldest daughter, Jane Chesney, for her life; to his second daughter, Laura Carlton, he left his *forgiveness*; and to his third and fourth daughters, Clarice Beauchamp, and Lucy Eleanor, the sum of three thousand pounds each. Lucy was left under the personal guardianship of his wife Eliza, Countess of Oakburn, who was charged with the expense of her education and maintenance; Clarice, when she was found, was to have her home with the countess, if she pleased, and if she did not so please, he prayed his daughter Jane to afford her one. Should it be ascertained that any untoward fate had overtaken Clarice (so ran the words of the will), that she

should no longer be living, then the three thousand pounds were to revert to Jane absolutely. Lucy's three thousand were to accumulate until she was twenty-one. A sum of three hundred pounds was to be equally divided at once between his four daughters, "to provide them with decent mourning," Clarice's share to be handed over to Jane, that it might be set aside for her."

Such were the terms of the will, as related to the earl's daughters; the part of it regarding his wife and son (the latter of whom was not born when it was made, though it provided for the contingency) need not be touched upon, for it does not concern us.

When the will was read, Mr. Mole laid it down, took up the copy of that of the dowager countess, and began to read it with scarcely a breath of interval. The old lady, who had plenty of money in her own right, had bequeathed five thousand pounds each to her grandnieces Jane and Lucy Eleanor Chesney. Jane's five thousand was to be paid over to her within twelve months, Lucy's was to be left to accumulate until she should be of age, both principal and interest. Neither Laura nor Clarice was mentioned in her will. Even to the last the old countess could not forgive Clarice for attempting to get her own living; neither had she forgiven Laura's marriage.



To express the sore feeling, the anger, the resentment of Lady Laura at finding herself passed over both by her father and her aunt, would be difficult. She was of a hasty and passionate temper, something like her father, too apt to give way to it upon trifling occasions, but she did not now. There are some injuries, or what we deem such, which tell so keenly upon the feelings, that they bury themselves in silence, and rankle there. This was one. Laura Carlton made no remark, no observation; she expressed not a word of disappointment, or said that it was such. One lightning flash of anger, which nobody saw but the solicitor, and outward demonstration was over.

The lawyer took four parcels of bank-notes from his pocket-book, each to the amount of seventy-five pounds. Two of these parcels he handed to Lady Jane, her own and Clarice's; one to the countess as the share of Lucy; the other parcel to Lady Laura.

And Laura took the notes without a word. Her indignant fingers trembled to fling them back in Mr. Mole's face; but she did contrive to restrain herself. "He might have left me better off," she breathed to Jane in the course of the evening; and then she bit her tongue for having said so much.


Jane also had her disappointment: but she had been prepared for it. Not a disappointment as

regarded money matters : she was left as well off as she expected to be, and felt grateful to her father for doing so much, and to her aunt for the handsome legacy. Her disappointment related to Lucy. That the child whom she had loved and tended, whom in her heart she believed herself capable of training into the good Christian, the refined gentlewoman at least as efficiently as the countess, should be left away from her care, entrusted to another, was indeed a bitter trial. Jane, like Laura, spoke not of her mortification ; but, unlike Laura, she strove to subdue it. "It is but another cross in my tried life," she murmured to herself. "I must take it up meekly, and pray for help to bear it."

"You should have her entirely indeed, did the will allow of it," said the countess to Jane, for she divined the disappointment, and the tears in her eyes proved the genuine fervour with which she spoke. "I love her greatly ; but I would not have been so selfish as to keep her from you. She shall visit you as often as you like, Lady Jane ; she is more yours than mine."

Jane caught at the words. "Let me take her home with me for a little change, then. She feels the loss greatly, and change of scene will be good for her. She can stay a week or two with me until you are strong again."

"Willingly, willingly," was the answer. "Ask



for her when you will, at any time, and she shall go to you. Unless—unless——” Lady Oakburn suddenly stopped.

“ Unless what ? ” asked Jane.

“ Oh, I feel that I scarcely dare to mention it,” returned the countess. “ I spoke in impulse. Pray pardon me, Lady Jane ! My thought was—unless you would come back again and make this your home.”

Jane shook her head. “ No,” she said, “ I think I must have a home of my own. I have got used to it, you see. But I will come to you sometimes, and be your guest.”

So Lucy went with Jane to South Wennock. They journeyed down on the second day after the funeral. Laura was silent on the way, somewhat resentful, as she brooded bitterly over the ill news she had to carry to her husband. Once she turned round in the carriage and spoke to Jane quite sharply.

“ Why did you never tell me you had asked papa about that torn note of Clarice’s ? Nobody seems to care for me, I think.”

Jane Chesney sighed wearily. “ I don’t know why I did not. Somehow I do not like to talk of Clarice ; and it only left the mystery where it was.”

They reached Great Wennock in safety. Laura had not apprised her husband of her coming, and

there was no carriage in waiting; the disappointment to be inflicted on him had deterred her. The omnibus and one fly stood at the station. Judith was hastening to secure the latter, but was too late. A handsome stripling leaped into it before her. It was Frederick Grey.

"Oh, Master Grey?" she said, in an accent of dismay. He looked tall enough now for Mr. Grey; but Judith adhered to the familiar salutation. "You'll give up the fly, won't you, sir!"

"I daresay, Judith!" returned the young gentleman with a laugh. "There's the omnibus for you."

"It's not for me, Master Frederick. The ladies are here."

He glanced across, caught sight of them, and was out of the fly in an instant, lugging with him a big box, which he took to the omnibus, and offered the fly to Lady Jane. He stood with his hat in his hand, a frank smile on his pleasant countenance as he pressed them to take it.

"But it is not right to deprive you of it," said Jane. "You had it first."

"What, and leave you the omnibus, Lady Jane! What would you think of me? The jolting won't hurt me; it's rather fun than otherwise. I should walk, if it were not for the rain."

"Have you come from London?"

"Oh no. Only from Lichford."

He helped to place them in the fly, and they were obliged to make room for Judith, for it was raining fast, and Jane would not let her go outside. Lucy gazed at him as he stood there raising his hat when they drove away.

"What a nice face he has!" she exclaimed. "I like him so much, Jane!"

"I declare I forgot to tell him that we saw his father," said Jane. "I must send for him to call."

Mr. Carlton's was first reached. Lady Laura got out, and the fly drove on with the rest towards Cedar Lodge. Mr. Carlton was at home, and he welcomed her with many kisses. It was late, and the tea was on the table; the room, bright with fire, looked cheering after her journey. Mr. Carlton loved her still, and the absence had been felt by him.

"Between Pembury and London you have been away thirteen days, Laura! And I, longing for you all the while, thinking they would never pass!"

"There is no place like home, after all," said Laura. "And oh, Lewis, there's nobody like you! We stayed over the funeral, you know, and—to—to hear the will read."

"And how are things left?" asked Mr. Carlton. "I suppose you are so rich now, we poor com-

moners must scarcely dare to touch you with a long pole."

Laura had been sitting before the fire, her feet on the fender, Mr. Carlton leaning caressingly over her. She suddenly sprang up and turned her back upon him, apparently busying herself with some trifles that lay on a side table ; she had an inward conviction that her news would not be palatable.

"Laura, I say, I suppose you inherit ten or twenty thousand pounds? The countess dowager was good to you for ten, I should think."

"I was deliberating how I should soften things to you, and I can't do it. I'll tell you the worst at once," she cried, flashing round and meeting him face to face. "I am disinherited, Lewis."

He made no reply: he only looked at her with eager, questioning eyes.

"Papa has not left me a shilling—save a trifle for mourning; it stated in the will that he bequeathed me *his forgiveness*. My aunt has given ten thousand pounds between Jane and Lucy; nothing to me."

A bitter word all but escaped the lips of Mr. Carlton; he managed to suppress it before it was spoken.

"Left you nothing?" he repeated. "Neither of them."

"Seventy-five pounds for mourning—and the 'forgiveness!' Oh, Lewis, it is shameful: it is an

awful disappointment ; a disgraceful injustice ; and I feel it more for you than for myself."

"And Jane?" he asked, after a pause.

"Jane has five hundred a year for life, and five thousand pounds absolutely. And other moneys contingent upon deaths. What shall we do, Lewis?"

"Make the best of it," replied Mr. Carlton. "There is an old saying, Laura, 'What can't be cured must be endured;' you and I must exemplify it."

She snatched up her bonnet and quitted the room hastily, as if to avoid saying more, leaving Mr. Carlton alone. A change came over his features then, and a livid look, whether called up by anger, or by memory, or by physical pain, appeared on them. The fire played on his face, rendering its features quite clear, although there was no other light in the room. This apartment, if you remember, had two large windows ; one looking to the front, one to the side, near the surgery entrance. The front window had been closed for the night ; the other had not ; possibly Mr. Carlton had a mind to see what patients came at that dusk hour. He stood in one position opposite this window, buried in thoughts called up by the communication of his wife. His eyes were bent on the ground, his hands fell listlessly on either side of him ; he

had trusted to this inheritance of Laura's to clear them from their imprudently contracted debts. Mr. Carlton so stood for some minutes, and then he lifted his eyes.

Lifted his eyes to rest upon—what? Peering into the fire-lighted room, its nose pressed flat against a pane of the window, was that never-forgotten face. The awful face, whether human or hobgoblin, which had so scared him the night of Mrs. Crane's death, and again the second night in Captain Chesney's garden.

It scared him still. And Mr. Carlton staggered against the wall, as if he would be out of its sight, his suppressed cry of terror resounding through the room.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WATERING-PLACE.

SEVEN years to look forward to is a vast period of time ; to the young it seems almost interminable. It is long in the passing : for we count it by hours, and days, and weeks, and months, and years. But what is it in the retrospect ?—a little bubble, as it were, on the ocean ; a speck in the span of life. Since the last chapter, seven years have gone over the heads of the actors in this history, and now the reader is invited to meet some of them again.

Seated on the sands of a fashionable and somewhat exclusive English watering-place, was a group of ladies. Some were working as they talked, some were reading, some were enjoying in idleness and silence the fresh breeze that came wafting over the sea, and some were watching the sports of the children in the distance, running hither and thither and making pies in the sand. A bevy of girls had congregated together, rather apart, but still within reach of speech and hearing. They were intent on

their own pursuits, their peculiar interests : dress, flirtation, the libraries, the fashionable promenades of the day, and the assemblies in the rooms at night. Just now they seemed inclined to be quarrelsome rather than sociable. Jealousy was creeping in amidst them.

"You may say what you will, Miss Lake," exclaimed one, "but I maintain that he is the most distinguished-looking man staying at Seaford. Am I right or not?" she added, appealing to her companions.

The speaker was a tall, stately girl, with aquiline features, pale and classic. She was the daughter of General and Mrs. Vaughan, and was staying with them at Seaford. The Miss Lake she had replied to was plain and cynical. And Miss Lake, in place of answering, again drew down the corners of her lips.

"I don't care whether he's 'distinguished looking' or not," spoke up a pretty girl, Fanny Darlington. "I know he is the pleasantest man I ever spoke to. And if he is 'distinguished' it does not make him disagreeable. I hate your distinguished-looking men; they are generally vain and unapproachable; two faults that he steers clear of. He danced with me twice last night."

"And not once with Augusta Lake, and that's why she is accusing him this morning."

A slight smile, suppressed out of good manners, appeared on the lips of several. Miss Vaughan was the only one who spoke.

"Dancing goes for nothing. A man may whirl his legs off, dancing with a woman, and yet not care for her: while he may be secretly attached to one, whom he never asks to walk through a quadrille."

"You say that, because he sits at your side in the rooms, and talks to you by the hour together, Helen Vaughan," interposed Fanny Darlington, who had a free tongue, and sometimes used it more than was quite requisite. "But you will be none the nearer him, for all that. I don't believe he cares two pins for any girl at Seaford."

A tale-telling flush rose to the face of Helen Vaughan. She shook back her head haughtily, as if to intimate that retort would be beneath her.

"Talking about the rooms, though, who was it he was with there last night?" asked Miss Lake. "I have not seen her there before. A lovely girl."

"I'm sure I saw him with no lovely girl at the rooms last night," struck in Helen Vaughan.

"I know who Miss Lake means," cried Fanny Darlington. "She *is* lovely. She sat with a tall, majestic-looking lady, quite a Juno, and he kept coming up to them. I was near when he asked her to dance; she refused, and said her mamma wished

her not; and he turned to the Juno, and inquired whether it was true——”

“A very ugly Juno in face, whatever she may be in figure,” interrupted Augusta Lake.

“How you do stop me! The Juno said Yes; she thought it better that (I could not catch the name) should not dance with him, because she would then have no plea for refusing others.”

“Some second-rate City people, who would stick themselves up for ‘quality,’ and say the frequenters of the rooms are not good enough for them,” remarked the general’s daughter, with a lofty sneer.

“No, they don’t look like that; quite another sort of thing,” said a young lady quietly, who had not yet spoken. “I think they *are* ‘quality,’ not would-be.”

“Rubbish!” cried Miss Lake. “How do you know anything of them, Mary Miller?”

“I have the use of my eyes, and can observe them as well as you, that’s all. You saw that child who came on the sands yesterday morning, with a maid and an old black servant?”

“Well, what of him?”

“In the afternoon I saw her—the young lady—driving about with the same child,” returned Miss Miller. “I infer that they are people of consequence.”

“How *can* you infer it?” flashed Helen Vaughan,

as if the remark disturbed her temper. "Every soul sojourning at Seaford drives out daily. You are turning silly, Mary Miller."

Mary Miller laughed as she answered. In her quiet way she liked to excite the ire of Miss Vaughan. "The carriage was well-appointed," was all she said.

"You may get 'well-appointed' carriages at the hiring-place, by paying six shillings an hour for them," was Miss Vaughan's scornful answer.

"So you may," said Mary Miller. "But the carriage they were in was not hired. The footman had powdered hair and a gold-headed cane; and the silver plates of the harness and the panels of the carriage displayed a coronet."

Had the speaker announced that the harness and panels displayed a live griffin rampant, it could not have aroused more excitement. "A coronet!" broke from the lips of those around.

"An earl's coronet. So if she is an earl's daughter, as we may assume, it would be somewhat *infra dig.* for her to be found dancing in these rooms, liable to be waltzed about by any clerk from London who may pay his subscription to go in—whatever you may say to the contrary, Miss Vaughan."

"It is singular I should not have observed them last night," was Miss Vaughan's remark.

"They did not stay long," said Fanny Darlington; "they seemed to come in more to see what the rooms were like, than to stay. He went out with them, but he came back again. He appeared to know them intimately."

"Some of his patients, no doubt," cried Miss Lake. "Medical men are always——"

"Hush, Augusta! Here he is. Don't ask who the people were."

A tall, slender man was slowly approaching the group. Certainly he was what Miss Vaughan had just described him—distinguished-looking. The thoughtful expression of his intelligent countenance, full of the beauty of intellect, gave him the appearance of being somewhat older than his age, which may have been near five-and-twenty. But it was neither for his fine form nor his handsome face that he was popular, popular with all classes; it was for his charm of manner. Quiet and refined, gentlemanly in bearing and in thought, he yet bore about him that ready frankness of speech, that winning courtesy to others, which is the great passport to favour, and which can never be assumed by those who possess it not.

Do you guess who it was? You have seen him before. It was that impetuous boy of years gone by, Frederick Grey. But Frederick Grey grown into manhood.

The change in the fortunes of Stephen Grey had been wonderful. At least it would have appeared wonderful, but that the rise had been so gradually progressive, one step leading easily and naturally as it were, to another. Eight years ago, barely so much yet, he had been a general practitioner in South Wenlock, the modest dispenser of his own medicines; and now he was Sir Stephen Grey, a baronet, and one of the royal physicians.

A wonderful rise, you will say. In truth it was. But the transition had been, I repeat, easy and gradual. His settling in London was the turning point in his fortunes, and they had continued to rise step by step throughout the subsequent years. Practice first flew in to him, and he obtained a name; how valuable that is to a physician, more especially a London physician, let them tell you; next he had been appointed to attend on royalty, and was knighted by the Queen; and now, about twelve months back, his patent of baronetcy had been made out for "Stephen Grey and his heirs for ever." There was scarcely a medical man in the metropolis who was so popular as Sir Stephen Grey; certainly none who had risen so rapidly.

Frederick, as you know, had been trained to his father's profession. He would soon take his degree as M.D. A break had occurred in his medical studies, for when Sir Stephen found his fortunes

rising, he judged it right to afford his son the advantages of a more liberal education, and Frederick was despatched to keep his terms at the Oxford University. No wonder he was sought after by those young ladies on the Seaford sands!—the heir to a baronetcy and the inheritor of wealth—for Sir Stephen was putting by largely! Added to these advantages were his own attractions of person, his high character, his fascinating manners,—the whole combined in one man might well be deemed a prize.

Lady Grey, no stronger in health than she had used to be, had come to Seaford for the sea air, accompanied by her son. They had been there a fortnight now, and Mr. Frederick, as you perceive, had not failed to make himself a mark of interest; though probably using no effort of his own in the process.

He walked slowly towards those susceptible young ladies, and a change came over them all: that change from apathy to interest which the presence of such a man is sure to bring. Perhaps there was not a girl sitting there but would have been glad to be his chosen, what with his own attractions and his fair prospects in life.

He shook hands with some, he chatted with others, he had a pleasant look and word for all; but Helen Vaughan contrived to monopolize him—as she generally did. He thought nothing yet of her doing so, for he was accustomed to the homage of women.

He never suspected she had any particular motive in it; most certainly he did not suspect that she was permitting herself to become seriously attached to him.

"How is Lady Grey?" called out Fanny Darlington.

"Thank you," he replied, "she is not well this morning. I begged her not to think of coming on the sands to-day."

"How vexatious!" exclaimed Miss Vaughan. "Vexatious that she should be ill, and vexatious on my own account," she added, with a fascinating smile. "You see this work that I am doing, Mr. Grey?"

"Very complicated work it seems to be," was his laughing reply, as he glanced at the fragile fabric of threads she held out to him.

"I cannot get on with it, do you know. I am doing it under Lady Grey's instructions, and cannot tell which part to take up next. If I thought mamma would not mind my walking alone through the streets, I would go to your house, and take further instructions from her. Is she well enough to see friends?" continued the young lady, quickly.

"Quite well enough."

"I think I must go to her, then. It is so tiresome to be at a stand-still. Besides, I am working against time; this is for a wedding present."

"I can tell you how to go on with it, if you choose," interrupted Augusta Lake. "There's not the least necessity for your troubling Lady Grey."

Helen Vaughan shook her head dubiously. "But if you should tell me wrong?—and I had the work to pick out again! No, I would rather trust to Lady Grey, as she has shown me all throughout. Would it be troubling her too much, Mr. Grey?" appealing to him with her handsome eyes.

"On the contrary, I think my mother would be glad to receive you," he replied. "On these monotonous mornings, when she is confined to the sofa, she is often pleased at the sight of a visitor."

Helen Vaughan rose, but she did not move away; she stood where she was, and seemed to be lost in perplexed deliberation.

"I scarcely know what to be at; mamma has so great a dislike to our walking through the streets alone."

Augusta Lake's lip curled scornfully, and she did not take any pains to hide it.

"Will you accept of my escort?" asked the gentleman of Miss Vaughan. Could he say anything less?

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed Helen, with a rosy flush. "Though I am extremely sorry to give you the trouble, Mr. Grey."

He had taken a step or two by her side when he found himself impeded. A little pale lad had come up, and was pulling him backwards. He wore a plain brown-holland tunic dress, and his straw hat had a bit of straw-coloured ribbon tied round it. There was nothing about the child to tell his quality or condition; his attire might have been equally worn by one of no degree, or by a son of her Majesty the Queen.

"Hey, Frank! Where did you spring from?"

"Mamma's there. She said I might run to you."

"Who is that child, Mr. Grey?" came the eager inquiry, for the gossiping young ladies had recognised him for the one of whom they had been making mention.

Mr. Grey caught the boy in his arms and perched him on his shoulder.

"Tell who you are, Frank."

Master Frank did not choose to speak; he was shy. One hand stole round Frederick Grey's neck; the fingers of the other he inserted in his own mouth.

"The child was here yesterday with a black servant," began Miss Lake, "but——"

"It was Pompey," interrupted the boy, finding his tongue. "Put me down, please, Mr. Grey; I want to go for my spade."

"There you are, then," he returned, depositing him on his legs. "But, Frank, I am ashamed of you. Not to tell your name when you are asked it!"

"It's Frank," said the boy, running away over the sand.

"Who is he really, Mr. Grey?"

"Lord Oakburn."

"Lord Oakburn! The young Earl of Oakburn, who was born when his father died?"

"The same," said Mr. Grey. He is a somewhat delicate boy, and Lady Oakburn has brought him here for a month's sea-bathing."

"It was his mother we saw you so amiable with at the rooms last night, then?" cried Miss Lake.

"And the young lady—who was she?"

"A very lovely girl; quite charming to look upon," interposed Fanny Darlington rather maliciously, as she stole a glance at Miss Vaughan.

"Who was she, Mr. Grey?"

"His sister, Lady Lucy Chesney."

"Are they patients of yours, Mr. Grey?" asked Helen Vaughan, in a cold tone.

"Of Sir Stephen's; not of mine," he answered, laughing.

"By the way, Mr. Grey, I thought you expected Sir Stephen down last Sunday."

"We expected him on Saturday, but he was

unable to come. He will be here next Saturday, if not prevented again."


The little lord ran up again, spade in hand.

"Mr. Grey, Lucy says I am to tell you we have heard from town."

"Is Lucy there?" suddenly responded Mr. Grey, turning his head. "She told me she——"


The words died away with the steps of the speaker: for he strode off, quite oblivious to any recollection of Miss Vaughan. At some distance, tracing characters on the sands with her parasol, in a cool and pretty muslin dress, stood an elegant girl of middle height and graceful bearing, her features inexpressibly refined and beautiful, her complexion bright and delicate. It was Lucy Chesney: the little girl of the short frocks and white-tipped drawers had become this lovely young woman of nineteen. The blushes rose to her face in so obvious a degree as Frederick Grey approached her, that they might have told a tale, had any one been there to read it. Miss Vaughan looked on from the distance, her heart sinking, her lips paling: if ever she saw the signs of mutual love, she believed she saw them then.

Miss Vaughan was not deceived. Love, and love in no measured degree, had long ago sprung up between Frederick Grey and Lucy Chesney. That introduction of Stephen Grey to the Countess of



Oakburn by Lady Jane—though indeed we ought to give Judith the credit of it—had led to a personal intimacy between the families, which had ripened into a close and lasting friendship. Lady Oakburn, poor for her rank, living a retired life in the house at Portland Place, educating Lucy, training her little boy, had been more inclined to form quiet friendships than to frequent the gay society of the world. A little gaiety now Lucy was out—and she had been presented this past spring—but the long friendship with the Greys could not be superseded by all the gaiety in the world. It had brought forth its fruits, that friendship; for Lucy Chesney's heart had gone out for all time to that attractive young man, now bending to her to whisper his honeyed words.

Medical men have their prejudices in favour of certain watering-places, some patronising one place, some another. Sir Stephen Grey's pet place was Seaford. His wife generally visited it once a year; in short, Sir Stephen recommended it to all his patients, especially to those whose maladies were more imaginary than real. It was he who had said to Lady Oakburn, not ten days ago yet, "Take the boy to Seaford." The boy, young Frank, was but sickly, and his mother, as a matter of course, was very anxious. The boy had the sturdy independence of his father, and the magnificent dark eyes, the plain good sense of his mother. "There's no



reason to be fidgety over him," Sir Stephen would say; he'll grow into a strong man in time." But Lady Oakburn was fidgety in that one particular, and Sir Stephen had this year ordered the boy to Seaford—Sir Stephen having no conception that the mandate would be a particularly welcome one to his son and Lucy Chesney, Lady Oakburn as little; for they had been utterly blind to the attachment that was taking root under, as may be said, their very noses. Talk of beetles being blind, men and women are far more so.

He went up to her, holding out his hand, and the cheeks wore the loveliest carmine flush as he bent to her with his whispered words. Very commonplace words, though, and there was no apparent necessity for her blushes, or for his sweet, low tones. Their love-making had not yet gone on to open avowal.

"You told me you were not coming here to-day, Lucy."

"I thought we were not. Mamma said it would be too hot, but she changed her mind. We had a note from Sir Stephen this morning."

"Ah! What about?"

"He has obtained the information for us regarding those German baths. It is very favourable, and mamma says now she wishes she had gone to them instead of coming to Seaford."

An interchanged glance from between their eyelashes, shy on Lucy's part, speaking worlds on his, and Lucy's eyes at least were dropped again. Lady Oakburn's going to the German baths instead of to Seaford would not have been acceptable to either.

"But, as Lady Oakburn is here, I suppose she will remain?" he said.

"I think so, now. It is only July, you know, and there may be time for Germany later. Mamma says we must remain a month, for she has written to ask Jane to come to us. At least, we must remain if Jane accepts the invitation."

"I hope she will!" involuntarily exclaimed Frederick. "Did Sir Stephen say whether he should come down on Saturday, do you know, Lucy?"

"I cannot tell. I did not read his letter. Mamma read it to me, but I don't know whether she read it all. Sir Stephen——"

"Mr. Frederick Grey, Helen bade me ask whether you had forgotten that she is waiting? She says perhaps it is inconvenient to you to keep your promise."

Frederick Grey turned to behold a girl of ten, Helen Vaughan's sister. Helen Vaughan had watched the speakers with a resentful spirit and jealous eye. It was more than her chafed temper could bear, and she called her sister from the

attractions of the sand pies, and gave her the message.

Following herself slowly on the heels of the little girl. As Frederick looked round, she had nearly come up to them. The child flew off to the pies again, and Helen spoke.

"It may be inconvenient to you now, Mr. Grey?"

"By no means. I shall be happy to accompany you."

The two young ladies stood, scanning each other's faces, waiting—as it seemed to him—for an introduction. He knew that Miss Vaughan's position, as the daughter of a general officer, would quite justify his making it to Lucy.

"Miss Vaughan : Lady Lucy Chesney."

Two cold distant curtsies, and the ceremony was over. The general's daughter was the first to speak.

"Not Miss Vaughan ; Miss Helen Vaughan. I have an elder sister. Her health was indifferent, and she stayed behind us at Montreal to come home later."

Montreal ? Vaughan ? The names struck some nearly forgotten chord in the memory of Lucy, in connection with a Miss Beauchamp who had gone out to Montreal as governess, and who turned out not to be Clarice. She made no comment, however,

no inquiry; the young lady's haughty face did not take her fancy. Neither perhaps did her intimacy with Frederick Grey.

A few interchanged words, cold and civil, two more distant curtsies, and the young ladies had parted: and Miss Vaughan was walking in the direction of the town, side by side with Frederick Grey.

"I don't like her a bit," thought Lucy, as she turned away. "I wonder how long Frederick has known her?"

In a quiet spot, apart from others, sat Lady Oakburn. The seven years had passed over her face lightly; and she looked nearly as young,—more magnificent than when, as Miss Lethwait, the captivated earl had asked her to become his wife. A hazardous venture, perhaps, but one that had turned out well: Lady Oakburn was a step-mother in a thousand. Seated by her side, having rushed up to claim acquaintance with her on hearing Frederick Grey's announcement, was a Mrs. Delcie. The acquaintance between them was very slight. They had met once or twice in some of the crowded rooms of London; but you know it is not all of us who get the chance to show to our sea-bathing friends that we are on speaking terms with a countess. Mrs. Delcie appeared inclined to make herself at home, and was already initiating Lady Oakburn into the politics of the place.

"You look tired, my dear child," exclaimed Lady Oakburn, when Lucy came up. "It is hot here. Would you rather go home?"

"I am not at all tired, mamma. I think Frank will be, by the way he is running about."

"It will do him good," returned Lady Oakburn. "You know what Sir Stephen says—that we wrap him up in lavender."

"Is that Sir Stephen Grey?" interposed Mrs. Delcie. "You know the Greys personally, perhaps?"


"Very well indeed," replied Lady Oakburn.

"I don't. But I should like to. I must get an introduction to Lady Grey. What a handsome young fellow is that son of theirs! *He* will not get away from Seaford heart-whole."

The words were spoken emphatically, and Lady Oakburn looked up with some curiosity. Lucy, who had sat down by her step-mother, bent her face and her parasol, and began her favourite pastime of tracing characters on the sands as she listened.

"That handsome girl, Helen Vaughan, has been making a dead set at him ever since he came here, and he does not respond to it unwillingly," continued Mrs. Delcie. "Some think that they are already engaged; but I don't know."

"I do not think that likely," observed Lady Oakburn."



“Why?”

“From what I know of Frederick Grey, he is not the man to choose a young lady for a wife, after knowing her for a fortnight only.”

“You would think it likely if you saw them together. He is ever with her, evidently smitten; on the sands, in the promenade, in the rooms, there he is by the side of Helen Vaughan. Some fancy his profession might be a bar in the general’s eyes; not it, say I: there’s the baronetcy to set off against it. It is to be hoped he will have her, for she’s dying for him.”

Lucy’s face turned white, and the parasol went scoring its marks according to its own will. *Was* it true, this? For the last few months she had been living as in a blissful dream of Eden: one that she had not cared to analyse. All she knew was, that the step of Frederick Grey sent her whole life-blood coursing through her veins, that his presence brought to her a rapturous bliss; his voice was sweeter than the sweetest music, the touch of his hand thrilled her every fibre. The sunny spring-tide of love had come for Lucy Chesney, and she had been glad that it should never pass.

Love took up the glass of time and turned it in his glowing hands
Every moment, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands.
Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all its cords with might;
Smote the chord of self, which, trembling, passed in music out of sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHANGES.

LADY JANE CHESNEY sat in her quiet drawing-room in the old house on the Rise. The Rise was a suburb of importance now; mansions, and villas with two entrance gates, and dwellings with a miniature lodge, and other grandeur, had sprang up. Seven years make changes in a place.

They had not made much in Jane Chesney. The former carking care, the disappointment, the trouble had passed; and these peaceful last years of quiet had smoothed her fair countenance instead of ageing it. One source of care alone was hers; and that had grown into a care of the past—the anxiety touching her sister Clarice. Strange as it may seem to have to write it, strange as it *was* in fact, nothing whatever had been heard of Lady Clarice Chesney. Not so much as a word, a hint, a sign had come to Jane of her in any way during the past seven years. Even Mrs. West—the only link, as it had seemed to Lady Jane between Clarice in being and Clarice lost—had disappeared. Not disappeared in the

same sense that Clarice had. Mrs. West had given up her house in Gloucester Terrace and gone to reside on the Continent for the benefit of her children's education. Her husband went with her. A successful man in business, he had realised a competency earlier than most men realise it, and had (perhaps wisely) retired from it altogether. So that Jane had seen nothing of the Wests since the short interview with Mr. West at the period of Lord Oakburn's death.

No, Clarice Chesney remained lost; her fate a mystery amidst the many mysteries of life; and time had flung its healing wings over the heart of Jane, and the anxiety and sorrow were now all of the past. It is true that moments of dismay would come over Jane, like unto that first waking of ours in the early morning, when all the old horror would return to her; the strange disappearance, the vivid features of the dreaded dream, the wearing suspense when she and the earl were afterwards searching for Clarice; and she would remember how faithfully she had promised her father to make the seeking Clarice the one chief object of her life. In these moments she would ask herself—was she doing so? But in truth she saw not anything that *could* be done, for all sources of inquiry had been exhausted at the time. Should any clue ever turn up, though it were but the faintest shadow of one, then Jane would act;

act with all her best energy, and strive to unravel it. A voice within her sometimes made itself heard, whispering that that time would come.

But the seven years had gone on, bringing none ; and seven years at Lady Jane Chesney's age seems a long span in the lease of life. The signs of care had left her face ; it was of placid gentleness ; and existence in a calm way had charms yet for Jane Chesney.

Not that little temporary worries never intruded themselves ; I do not know any one to whom they do not come. Even on this morning something of the sort is troubling Jane as she sits in her cool and shady drawing-room, where the sun does not penetrate until the noon is high. A letter has been delivered to her from Seaford from the Countess of Oakburn, and its contents are perplexing her, as her fair brow bends over it for about the twentieth time.

Lady Oakburn had written to her some days previously, inviting her to come and stay with them at Seaford. Jane declined it. She did not feel inclined to go from home just then, she wrote, but that perhaps, if all went well, she would spend Christmas with them in London. Jane's former antipathy to the countess had worn away : she truly esteemed her, and they were the best of friends. Her refusal was duly despatched, and a few days

passed on: but this morning had brought another letter from the countess, containing a few urgent lines of entreaty. "Do come to me at once, dear Lady Jane. I ask you for Lucy's sake. She is quite well; but I must have some advice from you respecting her."

The words puzzled Jane. Lady Oakburn had written in evident anxiety; in—Jane thought—pain; certainly in haste. Her letters were always so sensible and self-possessed that there could be no doubt something unusual had seriously disturbed her, and that it concerned Lucy.

"I shall go," decided Jane, as she folded the letter for the last time, and placed it in her pocket. "I do not like suspense, and I shall go to-day. We can get away by the three-o'clock train."

She rang for Judith, to give her the necessary orders, and in the same moment saw the carriage of her sister Laura stop at the gate. A grand carriage was Lady Laura's now, with its bedecked servants and all sorts of show and frippery attached to it, quite after Laura's own vain heart. Mr. Carlton the elder had quitted the world, and bequeathed his gains to his son; and none in all South Wennock were so grand as Mr. and Lady Laura Carlton.

She came in: the imperious look, which had now grown habitual, very conspicuous on her face; her

robe of pale green morning silk rustling and glistening, her Chantilly veil of white flung back. Jane could see in a moment that something had crossed her. Something often did cross her now. The sisters were not very intimate. Jane maintained her original resolution, never to put her foot within Mr. Carlton's house; and her intercourse with her sister was confined to these chance visits of Laura's. Laura sat down upon the nearest chair, flinging her dainty parasol of lace upon the table.

"Jane, I wish to goodness you'd let me have Judith!"

The words were spoken without any superfluous ceremony of greeting. When Laura was put out, she was as sparing of courtesy as ever had been the sailor-earl, her father. Jane looked at her in surprise.

"Let you have Judith, Laura! I don't know what you mean."

"That Stiffing has nearly driven me wild this morning with her stupidity," returned Lady Laura, alluding to her maid, "and if I could only get some one in her place to suit me, she should go this very day. Would you believe, Jane, would you *believe*, that she has gone and sent that lovely gold-coloured scarf of mine to the dyer's?"

"She must have done it in a mistake," observed Jane.

"But, good gracious, who but an idiot would make such a mistake?" retorted Laura. "I told her to send my brown scarf to be dyed, and she says she thought I meant my gold one, and she sent it, and it has come home this morning converted into a wretched thing of a black! I could have beaten her in my vexation. I wish you'd spare me Judith, Jane. She would suit me, I know, better than anybody else."

Jane shook her head. Perhaps she admired the coolness of the request. She said very little; but that little was to the effect that she could not spare Judith, and Laura saw she meant it.

"Don't part with a maid who suits you in other ways for one sole error, Laura," was her advice. "At any rate, I cannot give you Judith. I am going to take her away with me this very day. I am going to Seaford."

"To [Seaford!]" returned Laura, speaking as crossly as she felt. "Why, it was only last week when I met you in High Street you told me Lady Oakburn had invited you to Seaford, and you had declined to go."

"I know I did. But I have had another letter from her this morning, and have altered my mind. I shall go to-day."

Laura gave her head a toss in her old fashion.

"I'd not be as changeable as you, Jane. Then you won't give me Judith?"

"I am very sorry to deny you, Laura," was Jane's answer, "but I could not do without her."

Laura sat tapping the carpet with her foot. "I have a great mind to go with you," said she at length. "I am sure Lady Oakburn would be glad to see me."

"But I shall stay there a month."

"What of that?"

"Mr. Carlton might not like to spare you for so long."

"Do you suppose I study what he likes?" asked Laura, a scowl of bitter superciliousness crossing her face. "But I won't go: I should miss the races here."

For South Wennock was a gay place now, and held its own yearly races, at which nobody enjoyed themselves more than Lady Laura Carlton. These races brought to them some of the good county families, and Laura was in her element, keeping open house. She rose, said a cold adieu to Jane; she was capricious as the wind; and swept out to her carriage with pouting lips.

From that one little remark above of my Lady Laura's, the reader will infer that the domestic sunshine formerly brightening the daily life of Mr. Carlton and his wife, had not continued uninter-

ruptedly to illumine it. Things might have been happier with Laura perhaps had she had children ; but since that first infant, which had died at its birth, there had been no signs of any. Happier, in so far as that she would have had occupation,—a legitimate interest to fill her thoughts ; but it might not have made any difference to the terms on which she now lived with her husband. And the terms were not, on the whole, those of harmony.

The original fault was his. However haughty, sullen, passionate Laura might have become ; however aggravating in her manner to him as she often now was, let it emphatically be repeated that the fault lay originally with him. It was but a repetition of the story too often enacted in real life, though not so often disclosed to the world. Laura had loved Mr. Carlton with impassioned fervour ; she had so continued to love him for three or four years ; and then she was rudely awakened. Not awakened by the gradual process of disenchantment, but suddenly, violently, at one fell stroke.

It is the *spécialité* of man to be fickle ; it is the *spécialité* of some men to stoop to sin. Perhaps few men living were more inclined by nature to transgress social laws than was Mr. Carlton. He had been lax in his notions of morality all his life ; he was lax still. His love for his wife had been wild and passionate as a whirlwind ; but

these whirlwinds, you know, never last. Certain rumours reflecting on Mr. Carlton got whispered about; escapades now and again, in which there was, it must be confessed, as much truth as scandal, and they unfortunately penetrated to the ear of his wife. The town ignored them of course: was obligingly willing to ignore them; Lady Laura did not. She contrived to acquire pretty good proof of their foundation, and they turned her love for her husband into something very like hatred. It has had the same effect, you may be aware, in real life. Since then she had been unequal in her temper. The first burst of the storm over, the cruel shock in some degree lived down, she had subsided into an indifferent sort of specious civility: but this calm was occasionally varied by bursts of passionate anger, not in the least agreeable to Mr. Carlton. Personally he was loving and indulgent to Laura still. No open rupture had taken place to cause a nine days' marvel; before the world they were as sufficiently cordial with each other as are most husbands and wives; but Laura Carlton was an unhappy woman, looking upon herself as one miserably outraged, miserably deceived. Little wonder was there at the remark to her sister, "Do you suppose I should study what he likes?"

Lady Jane, attended by her faithful maid, drove to Great Wennock to take one of the afternoon

trains. The road was another thing that had been changed by the hand of Time. The old ruts and hillocks and stones had gone, and it was now almost as smooth as a bowling-green. As they entered the waiting-room, the omnibus renowned in this history, which still plied between the two towns, and now boasted of a rather more civil driver, and of new springs and of sundry outer embellishments, was drawn up in its place outside, waiting for the passengers from the coming train. Had Lady Jane and Judith turned their eyes to it in passing—which they did not—they might have seen seated in it a remarkably stout lady. It was an old acquaintance of ours, Mrs. Pepperfly. She had been on an errand to Great Wennock, and was taking advantage of the omnibus to return.

The train came up. It set down those of its passengers who wished to alight, and took up those who wished to go on by it. Amidst the latter were Lady Jane and Judith.

Mrs. Pepperfly had been enjoying a good dinner, comprising a proportionable [supply of beer. The result was, that she felt drowsy. Only herself was in the omnibus, and she sat nodding and blinking, when a slight stir at its door aroused her.

A passenger from the train had come up to take her place in the omnibus. She was a hard-featured, respectable-looking woman, dressed in good widow's

mourning, and she had with her a little boy and some luggage. She took her seat opposite Mrs. Pepperfly, and placed the child by her side; he was a delicate-looking lad of perhaps six years, with a fair skin and light flaxen hair. Mrs. Pepperfly, skilled in looks, detected at once that he was not in good health. But he was more restless than are most sickly children, turning his head about from the door to the side window incessantly as different objects attracted his attention.

“ Oh, mother, mother, look there ! ”

The words were spoken in the most excited manner. Two soldiers in their red clothes had come forth from the station; and this it was which caused the words. The mother administered a reprimand.

“ There you go again ! I never saw such a child ! One would think soldiers were some of the world's wonders, by the fever you put yourself into at sight of them ! ”

“ I have knowed some children go a'most wild at sight of a red-coat ! ” interposed Mrs. Pepperfly, without ceremony.

“ Then he's one,” replied the widow. “ He'd rather look at a soldier any day than at a penny peep-show.”

The omnibus started, having waited in vain for other passengers. The little boy, probably seeing

nothing in the road, or the fields on either side of it, to attract his admiration, nestled against his mother and was soon asleep. Mrs. Pepperfly had also begun to nod again, when the stranger bent over to her with a question.

"Do you happen to know a lady living about here of the name of Crane?"

Mrs. Pepperfly started and opened her eyes, hardly awake yet.

"Crane?" said she.

"I want to find the address of a lady of that name. Do you know a Mrs. Crane in South Wennock?"

"No, mum," answered Mrs. Pepperfly, her reminiscences of a certain episode of the past aroused, and not pleasantly, at the question. "I never knowed but one lady o' that name; and that was but for two or three days, eight year and more ago, for she went out of the world promiscuous."

The widow paused a minute as if she had lost her breath. "How do you mean?" she asked.

"She was ill, mum, and I was the very nurse that was nursing of her, and she was getting on all beautiful when a nasty accident fell in, which haven't been brought to light yet, and it put her into her grave in St. Mark's Churchyard."

"Was she hurt?" exclaimed the widow, hastily.

"No, nothing of that," answered Mrs. Pepperfly,

shaking her head. "The wrong medicine was given to her: it was me myself what poured it out and put it to her dear lips, little thinking I was giving her her death: and I wish my fingers had been bit off first!"

The stranger stared hard at Mrs. Pepperfly, as if she could not understand the words, or as if she doubted the tale. "Where did this happen?" she said at length. "Was she in lodgings in South Wennock?"

"She were in lodgings in Palace Street," was the reply. "She come all sudden to the place, knowing nobody and nobody knowing her, just as one would suppose a 'strange bird might drop down from the skies. And she took the Widow Gould's rooms in Palace Street, and that very night her illness come on, and it was me that was called in to nurse her."

"And is she *dead*?" repeated the stranger, unable apparently to take in the tidings.

"She have been lying ever since in a corner of St. Mark's Churchyard. She died the following Monday night. Leastways she were killed," added Mrs. Pepperfly.

The stranger altered the position of the sleeping child, and bent nearer to the nurse. "Tell me about it," she said.

"It's soon told," was the answer. "The doctor had sent in a composing draught. He had sent one

in on the Saturday night and on the Sunday night ; she were restless, poor thing, though doing as well as it's possible for a body to do ; but she were young, and she would get laughing and talking, and the doctors they don't like that—and I'll not say but there's cases where it's dangerous. Well, on the Monday night there was sent in another of these sleeping draughts, as the doctor thought, and as us thought, and I gave it to her, and it turned out to be poison, and her poor innocent soul went out after swallowing it ; and mine a'most went out too with the fright."

"Poison !"

"The draught were poisoned, and it killed her."

"But how came the doctor to send a poisoned draught?" asked the stranger in a passionate tone.

"Ah, there it is," returned Mrs. Pepperfly. "He says he didn't send it so—that it went out from him good wholesome physic. But, as me and the Widow Gould remarked to each other at the time, If he sent it out pure, what should bring the poison in it afterwards?"

"What was done to the doctor?"

"Nothing. There was a inquest sat upon her body, as I've cause to remember, for they had me up at it : but the jury and the crowner thought the doctor had not made the mistake nor put the poison

into the draught—which he had stood to it from the first he didn't."

"Then who did put it in?"

"It's more nor I can tell," replied Mrs. Pepperfly.
"I know I didn't."

"And was no stir made about it?" continued the stranger, wiping her face, which was growing heated.

"Plenty of stir, for that matter, but nothing come of it. The police couldn't follow it up proper, for they didn't know where she came from, or even what her crissen name was: and nobody has never come to inquire after her from that day to this."

"Who was the doctor that attended her?" was the next question; and it was put abruptly.

"Mr. Stephen Grey. One might say indeed that two was attending of her, him and Mr. Carlton: but Mr. Carlton only saw her once or twice; he was away from the town. She had Mr. Stephen Grey throughout, and it was him that sent the draught."

"Does he bear a good character?" asked the stranger, harshly.

"Mrs. Pepperfly opened her eyes. "What, Mr. Stephen Grey? Why, mum, nobody never bore a better character in this world, whether as a doctor or a man. Except that mistake—if it was him that made it—he never had a thing whispered again him before or since. He left the place after that to

settle in London, and he have got on, they say, like a house a-fire. I know this: he'd give his right hand to find out the rights about it."

"Is he a young man—an unmarried man?"

"Be you and me young and unmarried?" retorted Mrs. Pepperfly; for the want of sense in the question (as it sounded to her in her superior knowledge) excited her ire. "Him? He have been married this five-and-twenty year, and he's a'most as old as we be. There! There's the very church-yard where she's lying."

Mrs. Pepperfly pointed to the opposite side of the street which they were now approaching. And the stranger, in her eagerness to look at the church-yard, found her face brought violently in contact with the side of the omnibus, as it was whirled round the corner by the driver, to draw up at the door of the Red Lion.

CHAPTER XX.

RIVALRY.

WAS it a scene of enchantment?—such as those we read of in the Arabian Nights? Indeed it seemed like it. The assembly-rooms, brilliant with light, with garlands, with mirrors and beautiful statues, were thrown open to the outside, where the hanging terraces, redolent with the perfume of the night flowers, reposed so calmly in the moonlight. If only from the contrast, the scene would have told upon the heart and upon the senses. The garish rooms, speaking of the world and its votaries, hot, noisy, turbulent in their gaiety; the calm cool night, lying clear and still under the starred canopy of the blue heavens! Fairy forms were flitting in the rooms, strains of the sweetest music charmed the ear; hearts were beating, pulses quickening; and care, in that one dizzy spot, seemed to have gone from the world.

These Seaford assembly-rooms were made gay for that one night. A fête in aid of some local charity had been projected, and the first names

amidst the visitors at Seaford were down as patrons of it. The Right Honourable the Countess of Oakburn's headed the list, and amidst the rest might be read those of Lieutenant-General and Mrs. Vaughan. The Vaughans and the Oakburn family had become acquainted. General Vaughan's eldest son came to join them at Seaford, and he remembered his one night of introduction years before to Lord Oakburn's house. Lady Grey and Mrs. Vaughan were also intimate—the intimacy, you know, that we form at watering-places, warm while it lasts, but ceasing when the sojourn is over. So Lucy Chesney and Miss Helen Vaughan had been brought into repeated contact, and—if the truth must be told—desperately jealous were they of each other. Lucy heard the rumours obtaining in Seaford—that Mr. Frederick Grey was “in love” with Helen Vaughan. She looked around her and saw, or thought she saw, many proofs to confirm it. That Frederick Grey was the one object of attraction to half the young ladies staying at Seaford, could not be disputed; the chief part of his time was spent with them without any seeking of his own. *They sought him*; they laid their pretty little plans to meet him, to form engagements with him, to get him to their side. In the morning lounge, on the sands, in the walk, in the ride or drive of the afternoon, in some of the réunions of gaiety of the night,

there would he be with some or other of them ; more especially would he be with Helen Vaughan. Do not fancy he disliked it, although it was the fault of the young ladies more than of his ; Frederick Grey was no more insensible to the charms of pretty girls than are other men.

And Lucy saw all this ; saw it with the bitterest pain, with fierce resentment. It might be, that things looked a great deal worse to her than they would have looked to unprejudiced eyes, for jealousy, you remember, makes the food it feeds on. He had not spoken to her ; he had not told her that he loved ; and it may be excused to Lucy if she took up the notion that he never had loved her ; that the sweet consciousness that it was so, recently filling her heart, had been altogether a mistake ; and her cheeks tingled at the thought with a scarlet shame.

Frederick Grey himself helped on the delusion. Lucy's manners had so altered to him, had become so unaccountably cold and haughty, that he was avoiding her in very resentment.

Ah, who knew ?—the intricacies of this subtle heart of ours are so cunningly profound !—it might be that this haunting of the other demoiselles, this making love to them—if his flirtations could be called such—was but done to plague Lucy Chesney, and bring her allegiance back to him. In the midst of it all, Lady Oakburn had become acquainted

with the state of affairs. By the merest accident, her eyes, so long shut, were suddenly opened, and she saw that Lucy loved Frederick Grey. She had little doubt that he returned the love; she as little doubted that the passion was of some standing. There occurred to her dismayed memory the intimacy that had subsisted between them all in town; the interviews without number, in which he could have made love to Lucy had he chosen so to do.

The countess sat down aghast. She liked Frederick Grey herself beyond any one she knew; but what of Lady Jane? Would *she* deem him a suitable *parti* for Lucy? Would she not rather condemn him as entirely unsuitable?—and how should she herself answer to Lady Jane for her lax care of Lucy? Care?—as applied to love? Lady Oakburn in her self-condemnation forgot that the one is rarely a preventive to the other. She did the best that she could do. In her open straightforwardness she wrote that hasty letter to summon Lady Jane; Lucy meanwhile remaining entirely ignorant of the discovery and its results. Lucy had enough on her heart just then, if not on her hands, in looking out for food for her new jealousy.

It was not an ordinary evening at ordinary seaside gala-rooms, but a grand fête for which the rooms had for once been lent, and to which everybody of note flocked, not only of the temporary

visitors, but of the local, standing society. Much had been made of it; and the arrangements were of that complete, it may be said superb, nature, not often seen. You may be very sure the ladies' toilettes were not behind the rest in attraction.

Lady Oakburn and Lucy arrived late. So late indeed that Miss Helen Vaughan was saying to herself they certainly would not come. The little Earl of Oakburn was with them. The little earl was indulged a great deal more than was good for him, especially by Lucy, and his mamma had yielded to the young gentleman's demand of "going to the ball," upon the condition that when he had taken a twenty minutes' peep at it, he should retire quietly and be conveyed home by Pompey. The delay in their arrival was caused by their expectancy of Lady Jane. Jane had telegraphed to the countess that she was on her road, and they waited to receive her. But it grew late, and she had not come.

As Lucy entered the rooms, her eyes were dazzled for a moment by the blaze of light, and then they ranged themselves abroad in search of—what? Exactly in search of what she saw, and nothing less; of what her jealous heart had pictured. Whirling round the room in the mazy waltz, to the tones of the sweetest music, his arm encircling her waist, his hand clasping hers, his eyes bent upon her with admiration, or what looked like it, and his

voice lowered to whispered tones of softness, were Frederick Grey and Helen Vaughan. A pang, almost as of death, shot through Lucy's heart, and she shivered in her excess of pain.

Helen Vaughan looked well. She always did look so. Tall, regal, stately, fair : a fit companion for the distinguished Frederick Grey—and many were thinking so. But what was her beauty, compared to that of Lucy Chesney?—with her retiring grace, her exquisite features, her complexion of damask purity, and her sweet brown eyes? Both were dressed in white; robes soft, flowing, fleecy as a cloud; Miss Vaughan displayed an elaborate set of ornaments, emeralds set in much gold; Lucy wore only pearls, the better taste for a young lady. Both of them looked very very beautiful, and the room thought so; Helen Vaughan was praised in words, but a murmur of hushed admiration followed Lucy Chesney.

The waltz was over, and Frederick Grey made his way to Lucy. She affected not to see him; she had her head turned, and was talking volubly to Fanny Darlington: he had to touch her at length to obtain her attention.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she coldly said.
"Good evening."

"How late you are, Lucy! The dance for which you were engaged to me is over."

"I supposed it would be," she said, in her bitter resentment. "I told you at the time I promised that it was more than probable I should not perform."

"You will dance this next with me. I think it is to be the Lancers."

Was she deaf? She made no reply whatever, and her head was turned from him. At that moment, a gentleman was brought up and introduced to her; a little man who looked as if he had not two ideas in his whole brain, with an eyeglass popped artistically in his eye, and his sandy hair parted down the middle, back and front. She did not catch his name; it was Viscount Somebody, one of the county notabilities; but she put her hand within his arm when he solicited the honour of it for the forthcoming quadrille, and was moving away with him.

Mr. Frederick Grey's blood boiled up, dyeing his brow crimson. He laid his hand on Lucy's arm to detain her.

"I asked you first, Lucy."

She recoiled from the touch, as if there had been contamination in it. "I beg your pardon, did you speak to me?"

"I asked you for this quadrille. You are engaged to me for it, not to him."

"If you are anxious to dance it, there's no lack

of partners"—and her tone stung him with its indifferent coldness. "Plenty are waiting for you: Miss Lake, Miss Vaughan, Miss Darlington—look at them. Pray choose one."

She moved away in her haughty pride; a looker-on might have said in her calm indifference. But every pulse in her body was throbbing with pain, every fibre of her heart was sick with love—love for Frederick Grey.

His face was ablaze with anger, and he stood still for a moment, possibly undecided whether to make a scene and pull the little viscount's nose, or to let it alone. Then he went straight up to Helen Vaughan and asked her for the quadrille. They took their places in it, vis-à-vis to the viscount and Lucy.

Lady Grey was seated between the Countess of Oakburn and Mrs. Delcie. The latter, an inveterate busy-body, one of those wretched people who can never let anybody else be at peace, her eyes sharp as a needle, her brain active as a mischief-maker's tongue, watched Frederick Grey and Helen Vaughan for some minutes, and then turned to Lady Grey with a whisper:

"Is it a settled thing?" she asked.

"Is what a settled thing?"

"That your son marries Helen Vaughan?"

It was the first time the idea had been presented

to Lady Grey. Living much in seclusion, she had seen and known nothing of the doings of the outer world of Seaford. Her heart leaped up with a bound of dismay, for she did not like Helen Vaughan.

"Pray do not mention anything so improbable," she faintly said. "My son marry Helen Vaughan! Indeed I hope not!"

"Improbable you call it?" was Mrs. Delcie's answer. "Look at them."

Lady Grey did look. The Lancers were over, and he was taking Helen Vaughan back to her place. He was bending down to talk to her, and there was an *empressement* in his manner that she, the mother, did not like. The evening's pleasure had gone out for her.

Back came Lucy, escorted by the viscount; she sat down by Lady Oakburn. The seat next her was vacant now, and Frederick Grey dropped into it. My Lady Lucy's cheeks grew pale with inward agitation.

"Lucy, what have I done to you?"

"Done?" repeated Lucy, in a tone of supreme indifference mingled with a dash of surprise. "Nothing."

He bit his lip. "Will you tell me how I have offended you?"

"You have not offended me."

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"What should be the matter with me? Really I do not understand you."

Neither in real truth did he understand Lucy. Frederick Grey was not a vain man, and it *never* occurred to him to think that she could be jealous. *He* thought nothing of that foolish dalliance—flirtation—call it what you will—in which his hours were often spent; the society of those pretty girls was pleasant pastime, but to him nothing more. If Miss Vaughan threw herself rather more in his way than the rest did, he never gave it a second thought; and most certainly he did not cast a suspicion that it was changing the manners of Lucy Chesney. In the days that had elapsed since her arrival at Seaford, he had been at times greatly pained by her behaviour to him. He had set it down hitherto to some unaccountable caprice: now he began to think that her feelings to him were changing. And he had felt so sure of her love!

"Lucy, you must know that you are behaving very strangely to me. You heard me ask you for the Lancers, and you turned and engaged yourself to that little puppy, who is not worth a kick. Will you stand up with me the next?"

"Thank you: I do not intend to dance the next. I feel a little tired."

He paused a minute, rose from his seat, and

stood before her. "There must be some reason for all this."

"Reason for all what?"

"For your indifference to me."

"You may think so if you please."

"It looks very like caprice, Lucy."

"Caprice? Oh yes, that is it. It is caprice."

"Once for all," he rejoined, quite savagely, "will you dance the next dance with me, Lady Lucy?"

"No, I will not. Thank you all the same."

He turned on his heel. Lucy caught her little brother, who was running up to them.

"I am going home, Lucy," said the child. "Pompey's come, and I am going without being naughty, because I promised I would."

"There's my darling Frank," said Lucy, bending over him. "Wish mamma good night."

He was a brave, honourable little fellow, and he intended to go off blithely with Pompey, whose black face was seen at the door. The Oakburns were noted for holding a promise sacred; and it seemed that the future chief would be no degenerate descendant. Kissing his mamma, he put up his face to Lady Grey; but that lady was too much engaged to pay attention to him, and the boy ran away without it.

Lady Grey had her face turned to her son. She had pulled him to her when he was quitting Lucy.

Mrs. Delcie had left her seat then, and Frederick halted before it, listening to his mother's whisper.

"Frederick! only a word—to ease my troubled heart. Surely you are not—you are not falling in love with Helen Vaughan!"

"I don't think I am, mother."

The answer was given gaily, lightly. All conscious of that other love so deeply seated in his heart, he could afford to joke at this. But he caught the anxious look of pain in his mother's eyes.

"You would not like her for a daughter-in-law?" he breathed, laughing still.

"I confess I should not."

"Very well. Be at ease, mother mine. What put such a thing into your head?"

"They say she is in love with you—that you love her. They are saying she is your chosen wife."

"I am much obliged to them, I'm sure. Who are 'they'?"

"Oh—the room of course," replied Lady Grey. "The people stopping at Seaford. Frederick——"

"Mr. Grey, do waltz with me, if you are not engaged."

The interruption came from Miss Fanny Darlington. She was quite young, and therefore deemed herself justified in acting as a child or a

romp. He was not engaged, he said, and laughed as he took her on his arm.

"When is the wedding to be?" she asked, as he whirled her to the strains of Strauss's music.

"What wedding?"

"As if you did not know! It can mean nothing else, when your attentions are so marked. Mrs. Delcie says she knows for a fact the general has consented."

"When did she say that?"

"This evening. She was talking to me and Lady Lucy Chesney."

A change came over his features. Was *this* the secret of Lucy's inexplicable conduct to him—some wretched gossip linking his name with General Vaughan's daughter? All his gaiety seemed to have gone from him, and his tone, as he spoke to Fanny Darlington, was changed into one of grave earnestness.

"Miss Darlington, will you allow me to remind you—as I most certainly shall Mrs. Delcie—that to speak of Miss Vaughan in this way, or of any other young lady, is unjustifiable. I am certain it would seriously displease her—and it has displeased me."

He went through the rest of the waltz in silence. Miss Darlington grew cross, and asked what had come over him. At its conclusion he looked for Lucy and could not see her.

Lucy Chesney had gone out from the garish rooms: they accorded ill with her aching heart. In a corner of the terrace, shaded from observation by the clustering trees, she stood, leaning over the rails and gazing on the sloping gardens beneath, lying so cold and still in the light summer's night. Cold and still was her own face; cold and still her unhappy heart: its pulses felt as if frozen into stone; its life-blood to have left it. The waltz was over; she could hear that; and she pictured him with her happy rival, whispering his sweet vows in her ear. She stood there in her bitter misery, believing that he, whom she so passionately loved, had deserted her for another! The sound of laughter, of merriment, came from the rooms; the rich strains of the music were again floating on the air; the fragrant flowers, giving forth their strong night perfume, rose at her feet: all pleasant things in themselves, but they grated inharmoniously on Lucy's heart.

What had become of the old bliss that had made her days seem like a dream of Eden? It was gone. All had changed since their sojourn at Seaford; the joy had left her, the sweet half-consciousness of being beloved had departed, to give place to the bitterest jealousy.

Why did Helen Vaughan so seek him? Why do girls thus beset attractive men?—ay, and men who are not attractive? Perhaps she hoped she should

gain him ; perhaps she but thought to while away her idle hours. However it might have been, it brought to Lucy Chesney fruits that seemed like bitter ashes. But she had to digest them ; and never, never had they been harsher or more cruel than at that moment, as she hung over the terrace in the moonlight.

Her hands were clasped together in pain, and her forehead was pressed upon the cold iron of the rails, as if its chill could soothe the throbbing fire within. A cloud of images was in her brain, all bearing the beautiful but dreaded form of Helen Vaughan, and—some one touched her shoulder, and Lucy shivered and looked up.

It was Frederick Grey. What had he come out there for ? *He* to see her in her abandonment of grief !

“ Lucy ! ” he whispered, and the tone of his voice spoke of love if ever tone spoke it. “ Lucy, are you ill ? ”

She would have been glad to fling his hand away, to fly from him, to meet his words with scorn ; but she could not : for the heart will be true to itself, and the startled agitation unnerved her. She shook like a leaf.

He gently wound his arms round her, he bent over her and poured forth his tale of love—to be suppressed no longer : he told her how passionately

he had hoped to make her his ; that if he had been silent, it was because he feared the time to speak had not come. Lucy, in the revulsion of feeling, burst into tears, and yielded herself up to the moment's fascination.

"Oh, Lucy, how could you suffer this cloud to come between us?" he whispered. "How could you suspect me of faithlessness? My darling, let me speak plainly. We have loved each other, and we both knew it, though it may be that you scarcely acknowledged the fact to yourself; but here, without witnesses,—save One, who knows how ardently and loyally I will cherish you, under Him—surely we may lift the veil from our dearest feelings! Lucy, I say, we have loved each other."

She did not answer, but she did not lift her face from its sheltering place on his breast. The moment of rapture, shadowed forth in her dreams, had come!

"I was not conscious until to-night, ten minutes ago, that my name had been made free with, as it appears it has been, in connection with Helen Vaughan's. Lucy," he resumed, "I swear to you that I have not willingly given cause for it; I swear to you that I have had no love for her, or thought of love. I certainly have been brought much into contact with her, for you have estranged yourself from me since you came, and the idle hours of this

place have hung upon my hands; but I cast my thoughts back and ask how far it has been my fault, and I believe I can truly say"—he paused with a quaint smile—"that I have been more sinned against than sinning. Lucy, when I have been walking by her side, my heart has wished that it was you: in conversing with her, I longed for your voice to answer me. Will you forgive me?"

Forgive him? ay. Her heart answered, if words failed. He bent his face to hers in the hushed night:—

"Believe me, Lucy, I love you as few men can love; I picture to myself the future, when you shall be mine; my cherished wife, the guiding-star of my home; my whole hopes, my love, my wishes are centered in you. You will not reject me? My darling, you will not reject me!"

How little likely she was to reject him, he contrived to gather. And the twinkling stars shone down on vows, than which none sweeter or purer had ever been registered.

"Lucy, you will waltz with me now?"

She dried her happy tears; and, as she returned to the room to take her place with him in the dance, she laughed aloud. The contrast between that time and this was so great! Miss Helen Vaughan and the little viscount whirled past them,

and Frederick darted a saucy glance into Lucy's eyes. It made hers fall on her blushing cheeks.

Lady Jane Chesney had arrived when they reached home. After Lucy had retired for the night, Lady Oakburn opened her mind to Jane; she could not rest until she had told her all—how that Frederick and Lucy were in love with each other. Jane at first looked very grave: the Chesney pride was rising.

"I could not help it," bewailed the countess in her contrition. "I declare to you, Lady Jane, often as Frederick Grey came to us in Portland Place, that I never for a moment thought or suspected love was arising between him and Lucy. Our great intimacy with the Greys, and Sir Stephen's attendance as a medical man, must have blinded me. I would give the world—should this be displeasing to you—to recall the past."

"Nay, do not blame yourself," said Jane, kindly. "It is very probable that I should have seen no further than you. Frederick Grey! It is not the match altogether that Lucy should make."

"In some respects it is not."

Jane remained silent, communing with herself, her custom when troubled or perplexed. Presently she looked at Lady Oakburn. "Tell me what your opinion is. What do you think of it?"

"May I tell it freely?"

"Indeed I wish you would," was Jane's answer. "You have Lucy's welfare at heart as much as I have."

"Her welfare and her happiness," emphatically pronounced Lady Oakburn. "And the latter I do fear is now bound up in this young man. In regard to him, as a suitor for her, there are advantages and disadvantages. In himself he is all that can be desired, and his prospects are very fair; Sir Stephen must be a rich man, and there's the baronetcy. On the other hand, there's his profession, and his birth is wholly inferior; and—forgive me for saying it, Lady Jane—the Chesneys are a proud race."

"Tell me what your own decision would be, were it left to you," repeated Jane.

"I should let her have him."

Jane paused. "I will sleep upon this, Lady Oakburn, and talk with you further in the morning."

And when the morning came, Jane, like a sensible woman, had arrived at a similar decision. The first to run up and greet her as she quitted her chamber, was the little lord. Jane took him upon her knee in the breakfast-room, and turned his face upwards.

"He does not look ill, Lady Oakburn."

"I have no real fears for him," replied the countess. "In a few years I hope he will have acquired

strength. Frank, tell sister Jane what Sir Stephen says."

"Sir Stephen says that mamma and Lucy are too fidgety over me ; that if I were a poor little country boy, sent out in the corn-fields all day to keep the crows off, with only brown bread and milk for food, I should be all right," cried Frank, looking up to his sister.

Jane smiled, and thought it very probable Sir Stephen was in reason.

"Do you know, sister Jane, what I mean to be when I grow up a big man ?" he continued. "I mean to be a sailor."

Jane faintly smiled and shook her head.

"Yes, I do. Mamma says that, if I were the poor little country boy, I might be one ; but, as I am the Earl of Oakburn, I shall have other duties. But I want to be a sailor. Oh Jane, I do wish I could be a sailor ! When I see the ships here, I long to run through the waves and get to them."

"It is surprising what a taste he has for the sea," murmured the countess to Jane ; "he must have inherited it." And poor Jane sighed with sad reminiscences.

Lucy came in. Jane took her hand, and smiled as she gazed at the bright and blushing face.

"And so, Lucy, you have contrived to fall in love without leave or licence !"

Lucy coloured to the roots of her hair, to the very nape of her delicate neck; her eyelids were cast down, and her fingers trembled in the hand of Lady Jane. All signs of true love, and Jane knew them to be so. The Countess of Oakburn approached Jane.

"I know you have felt the separation from Lucy," she said, with emotion. "Had the terms of the will been such that I could have departed from them, Lucy should have been yours. I could not help myself, Lady Jane; but I have tried to make her all you could wish."

"All any one could wish," generously returned Jane, as she took Lady Oakburn's hand. "You have nobly done your part by her. Do it by the boy, Lady Oakburn, and make him worthy of his father. I know you will."

"Being helped to do so by a better Help than mine," murmured the countess, as her eyes filled with tears.

And when Mr. Frederick Grey arrived that day and spoke out—as he did do—he was told that Lucy should be his.

END OF VOL. II.

